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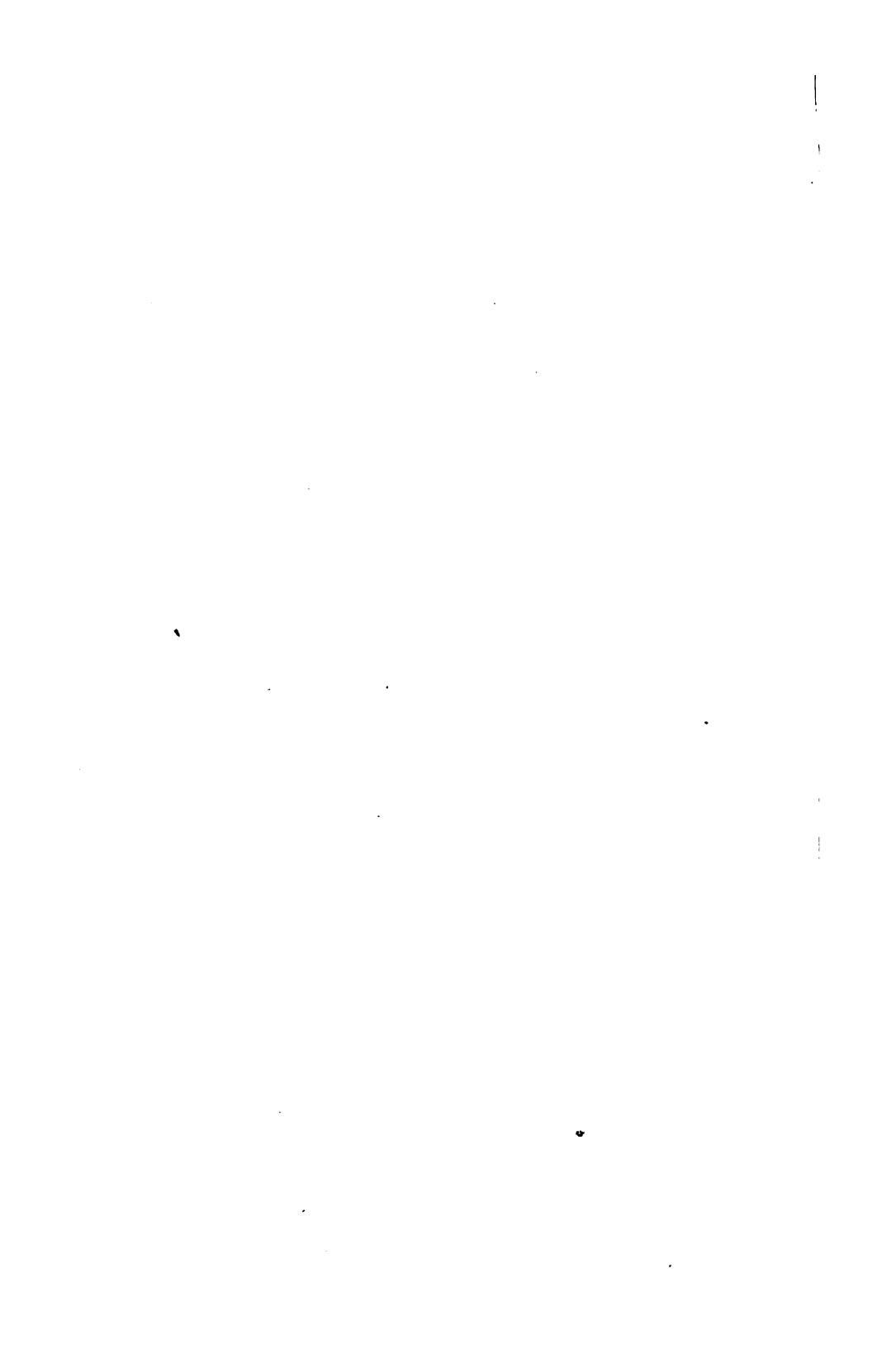
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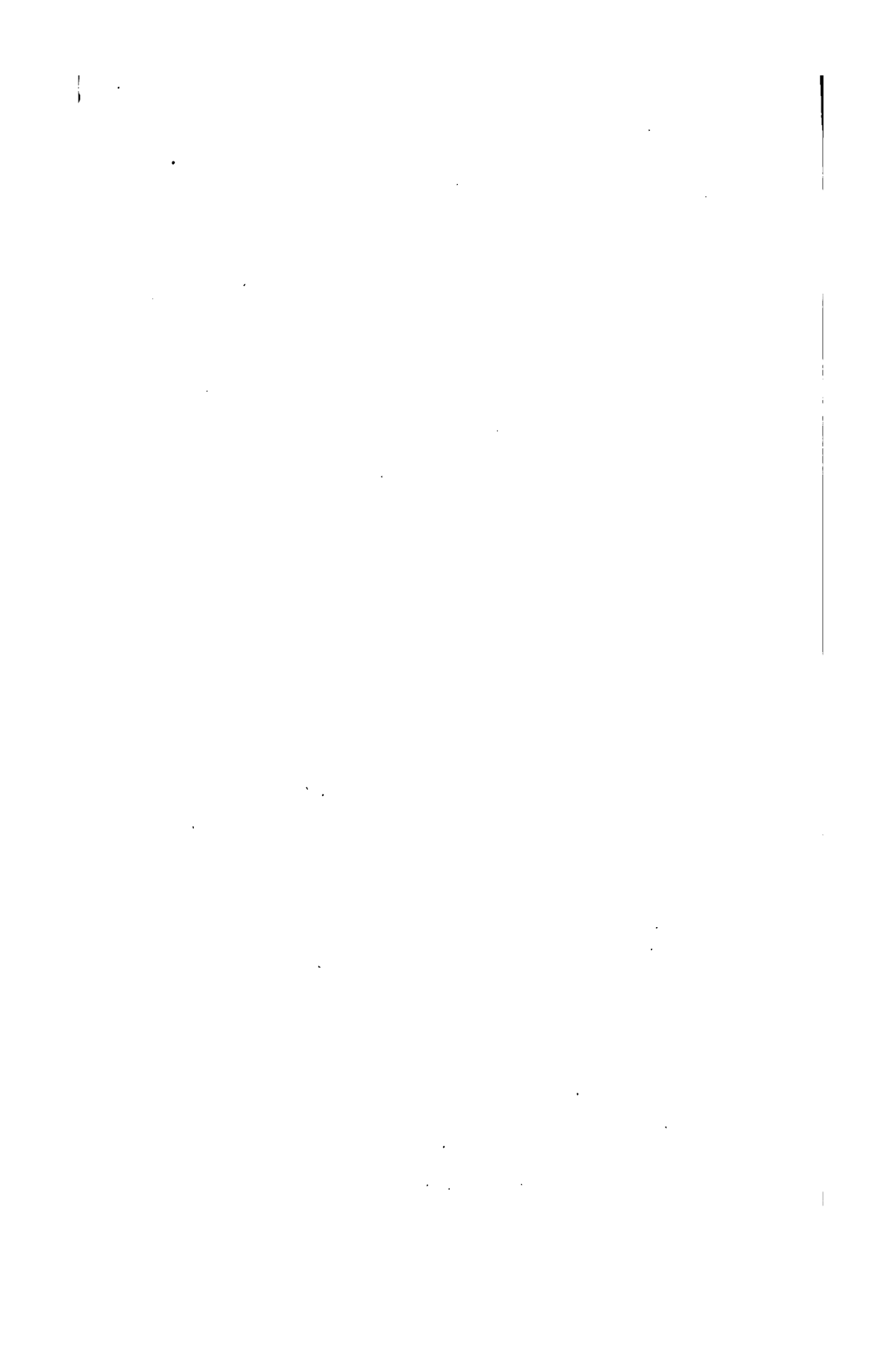


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DOWN IN DEVON.



DOWN IN DEVON.

A Pastoral.

BY S. W. FULLOM,

AUTHOR OF

"TIME WILL TELL," "THE GREAT HIGHWAY," ETC., ETC.

"Now from the town,
Buried in smoke and sleep and noisome damps,
Oft let me wander o'er the dewy fields,
Where freshness breathes."

THOMSON.



IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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DOWN IN DEVON.

CHAPTER I.

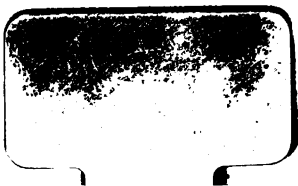
LAYING TOILS.

BEFORE Mr. Rivers could speak, Ralph discovered his mistake by finding himself in the recess of the window. An open sash at the side, on a level with the ground, admitted the fresh air, which came to him like a restorative, and almost tempted his exit by the opening. Through this Letty made her escape, directly she entered the recess. She thus missed being now surprised by Ralph, and, at the same time, had avoided overhearing his conversation with her father.

But Ralph left the house by the door.



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DOWN IN DEVON.

"And a very good notion, if she can always get the sugar and water," rejoined Ralph, smiling without being dubious.

"And I think you had better make sure of this by stopping in England," returned Mrs. Dorrington. "I know of a post that will suit you for the present—just till we obtain something better. Only last night I heard my friend Mr. Hargrave say he wanted a secretary."

"Hard work, and harder pay, of which it will be still harder to obtain payment," remarked Fay.

"Surely you exaggerate the attractions!" cried Ralph.

"Yes, eulogy must be strong in the present day to produce effect," observed Mrs. Dorrington, "and Fay never damns with faint praise — nor faint censure, neither. However, I guarantee Mr. Hargrave's payment. The question is, do you incline to the post? because, if you do, I and Fay will go off at once to Mr. Hargrave, and secure it for you."

“Can I look to you for so much kindness? Then I gratefully accept your service, whether it obtains me the post or not.”

CHAPTER II.

RALPH BECOMES A SECRETARY.

RALPH received a billet from Mrs. Dorrington, telling him to call next morning on Mr. Hargrave, who would give him a favourable reception. The popular member had taken a furnished dwelling for the session in Northumberland Street. The house was dark, and the furniture dowdy, but Lisabee knew how to colour both, and by a judicious use of chintz, cotton velvet, and the like materials, she raised the rooms from the condition of grave to gay. The weekly sum allowed her for housekeeping left small margin for such achievements, Mr. Hargrave priding himself on being a domestic, as well

as political economist, even carrying the principle so far as to boast that he travelled second-class on the railway. The avowal was regarded by the multitude as heroic, particularly as Mr. Hargrave, being also a philanthropist, enjoyed the repute of expending all his savings on benevolent objects; but it caused the knowing ones to shut one eye, intimating that the practice arose from shabbiness. To tell the truth, Mr. Hargrave's philanthropy had very little substance, for he not only followed Archbishop Whately, in never giving a penny to a beggar, but he never gave one to anybody. He patronised a number of philanthropic societies, but the patronage was confined to lending his name as a vice-president, and to making a gushing speech at the annual dinners—both methods of advertising himself. Supposed to possess all the talents—at once a geologist, naturalist, archæologist, artist, and author, a master of arts, and of sciences, too, all his gifts really arose out of the gift of the gab. This he aired on every

opportunity—in the House, at meetings and dinners, in the lecture-hall, and at those great jumbles of nobodys with somebodys, the Social Science Congress and the British Association. If omniscience was Professor Wheevell's foible, it was Mr. Hargrave's foil, serving to throw up his brilliancy, for his knowledge of any and every subject seemed to be limited only by the length of his tongue. In politics he was an extreme Liberal, but in two great crises had voted and spouted against his party, on the ground that it didn't go far enough, though he afterwards accepted both measures, when the Premier, to smooth the way, provided for two of his relations.

Mr. Hargrave received Ralph in his private room, which attested the infinity of his avocations by a litter of papers, letters, and blue books, and in which he was sitting, pen in hand, in the thoughtful posture, and with the intellectual air, depicted in his photograph, looking on the whole a goose. Ralph's interview was very satisfactory, and

ended by Mr. Hargrave nominating Ralph his secretary. Only at this moment did Ralph remember that nothing had been said about honorarium; but he felt a delicacy in broaching this subject, and thought it better to let it stand over, and trust to Mr. Hargrave's honour. So he at once sat down, and attacked a pile of letters, which he was directed to *précis*; and his chief, relieved of so much drudgery, proceeded to the light task of squeezing a book from the circulating library into a lecture, the book itself being all pillage.

Thus they went on for several days. Mr. Hargrave worked like a slave, and kept his secretary at the same pitch, hurrying him from task to task, then dragging him down to the House, to committees, and finally deputing him to receive bores. Ralph found it rather fagging, but he learnt something of life, and was content to go on.

Mr. Hargrave paid great court to editors of newspapers, and, in consequence, hardly a day passed without some mention of his

name, attention being called to his utterances by such announcements as "Mr. Hargrave on Foreign Affairs," "Mr. Hargrave on Education," "Mr. Hargrave on Literature and Art," "Mr. Hargrave on Domestic Washing;" for as nothing was too great, so nothing was too small, for this Titan to handle. Like the steam hammer, he could knock down a house, and, with the same power, crack a nut without grazing the kernel.

Of course, Mr. Hargrave had a tail. This appendage, like tails in general, was comprised of a number of minute muscle, small notabilities and oddities, with one or two luminaries—the great joints—to keep it whisking. Mr. Hargrave paraded the tail every Sunday night—that is, he gave a weekly reception on that evening, electing Sunday to show his freedom from sectarian prejudice, but especially because it was convenient. Ralph found a card at his lodging—for he had left the hotel, and taken rooms at Mr. Grip's—and in the course of the

evening joined the throng in the drawing-room. Portia and Lisabee stood just within the door, and shook hands with every comer, while their father walked about, speaking now to one, and now to another. Ralph looked round, and descried Mrs. Dorrington and Fay.

"Did you ever see such funny people?" said Mrs. Dorrington, as he presented himself.

"There is hardly one lady whose dress isn't a make-up," observed Fay.

"And there are a good many who are a make-up altogether," remarked her mother, in happy forgetfulness of her own sins.

"That is always the case," rejoined Fay; "and I must say there is less of it here than I have observed anywhere. I saw a woman over there with no back hair, and what she has in front is parted like a man's."

"That is the Reverend Charlotte Strong," said Ralph.

"A Reverend at a Sunday party," exclaimed Fay. "What would my cousin

Isaac think of such a spectacle. Nay, what would he think even of our being here?"

"We are not Dissenters," frowned Mrs. Dorrington. "And I wish you wouldn't get into the way of always quoting Isaac."

Fay slightly coloured.

"It is a proof of Miss Dorrington's discernment," observed Ralph; "for Mr. Wingfield is just the man one can bear to hear quoted, without getting out of temper."

"What have you to say to that, mamma?" cried Fay, with a grateful look at Ralph.

"I say I had rather hear the opinion of the Reverend Charlotte Strong," answered Mrs. Dorrington.

"She is coming this way, and I will afford you the opportunity by presenting her," smiled Ralph.

The reverend lady was accordingly introduced, and during the ceremony gave Ralph a full view of the bald part of her head.

"There seems to be a doubt of the propriety of these assemblies on Sunday,"

Ralph remarked, "but your presence shows you, at least, entertain none, and you may be able to remove our scruples."

"Is it possible you can have any?" cried the Reverend Charlotte. "How deep-rooted are the prejudices of mankind. Let us preach fetish, and we are sure to find believers directly, but who believes in reason?"

"Don't you?" asked Fay, naively.

The Reverend stared at Fay, and Fay stared back, on which the Reverend swang round, and stalked away.

"We have missed being perverted," exclaimed Mrs. Dorrington, "and all through Fay's inquisitiveness."

"Wasn't my inquisitiveness very natural? I should enjoy being perverted as much as anybody; but if it can't be done without my holding my tongue, I had rather remain good."

"The sacrifice is too great, at any rate, for your friends," remarked Ralph; "so I shall also vote for your remaining good."

"Which will probably secure the object,

as Fay is very much influenced by you," observed Mrs. Dorrington, diplomatically. And not to make the point too apparent, she added, adroitly, "Is it not strange that all the woman doctors and preachers and philosophers are ugly? Why should a lady-Atheist have no back hair?"

"And a muddy complexion?" added Fay.

"And a pug nose?" said Mrs. Dorrington.

"And a contracted chest?" urged Fay.

"What monster are you describing?" cried Harry Clayton, here sauntering up in company with Portia Hargrave.

"An unprotected female, of course," answered Fay.

"But who is very well able to take care of herself," added Mrs. Dorrington.

"So are all females, I hope," remarked Portia, with a majestic air.

"No doubt of that," rejoined Fay; "but don't you think some of them are better employed in taking care of others. That is what we are intended for; and if we want to turn the world upside down, as you seem

to, we shall do it much easier as women, than by shamming to be men."

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Ralph. "This is sound doctrine, and has the advantage of being good sense, too."

His appreciation of Fay won an approving smile from her mother.

"If Miss Dorrington means women are to remain in their present condition, I can't join in your applause," observed Harry, feeling his old antagonism to Ralph, and at the same time his habitual bitterness against the arrangements of society. "Woman must enter the Universities, which are now only partly opened to her, and in which she ought to be allowed to compete equally with men; and she has an equal right with man to engage in the professions."

"Oh! pray don't bring us to engage in professions," cried Fay. "They come naturally from men, and we like to listen to them, even when we don't believe them—though I always do. But what can a woman profess, unless to enter a convent?"

"Is *that* your highest flight?" cried Portia. "Have you no thoughts of a place in public life: of liberation from our gall-ing yoke, bondage, thralldom, servitude, and slavery? Are you satisfied to wash, darn, hem, and stitch, and crotchet, when you may heal, preach, plead, harangue, and vote?"

"I see no reason why all this should not be," said Harry. "Women excel as artists; they are sculptors and painters; they are authors, and they have proved they can be preachers and doctors."

"They are authors and artists without stepping out of their sex," answered Ralph. "Nay, by natural instinct, art and literature afford a field for the exercise of their grace, their delicate touch, their pathos, and their love of the beautiful. But preaching and doctoring open a different field, and I imagine they can't enter it without leaving their modesty behind."

Harry sprang to combat this opinion, but, before he could speak Ralph was drawn

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away by Mr. Hargrave, and Harry was himself assailed by Lisabee, who objected to so promising a party being longer exposed to Fay's attractions.

CHAPTER III.

HOW TO GET A SERVICE OF PLATE.

MR. HARGRAVE led Ralph into a corner, out of hearing of the company.

"I have something very confidential to say to you," he observed. "I am placed in a very embarrassing position."

"Indeed," replied Ralph. "Is it anything I can assist you in?"

"You are very good. Upon my life, Granby"—Mr. Hargrave pronounced the name quite affectionately,—“I don't know what I could do without you. You make yourself so useful, and you are so obliging; and you manage things so capitally. And this is a business I don't know any one but yourself I could trust to meddle with.”

"I am flattered by such a proof of your confidence," rejoined Ralph, feeling what he said; "and you shall not, at any rate, find me wanting in zeal."

"Nor in tact, I am very sure; and the present affair requires both qualities, for it amounts to this: I have discovered a movement is on foot to present me with a testimonial, in the shape of a service of plate."

"I am delighted to hear it."

"Well, I believe I have earned a service of plate, and that my claim will be generally admitted, but in my eyes the thing is open to one objection. You can't get a testimonial without its being suspected that you started it yourself."

"You don't say so! How can such a thing be possible?"

"It is done by a nudge of the elbow. Now, I value my high character more than all the plate in the world, and I can't have it laid open to such a suspicion. I don't wish to wound the promoters of the design by quashing it; but this I must do, unless

it comes out in connexion with names which guarantee its genuineness. For instance, there are people here to-night who ought to be on the committee—perhaps they are; and, certainly, I couldn't accept a testimonial to which they haven't given this support."

"I see," concurred Ralph.

"And the point is to ascertain whether they are supporting it," pursued Mr. Hargrave.

"Precisely."

"Which," continued Mr. Hargrave, looking down, "it seems to me can only be done by delicately referring to the movement, and letting them know that I shall decline the plate, unless I find their names on the committee. Now, there are Jones, and Robinson, and Rogers, and White, and Evans, and Tracey,"—Mr. Hargrave nodded in the direction of the victims—"who, being under favours to me, have no doubt taken up the thing warmly, and I daresay they could tell you all about it."

"I will find out what they know," said the innocent Ralph, falling headlong into the pit.

The victims knew nothing of the movement, but they suppressed their ignorance, and instantly understood that it existed—in Mr. Hargrave's brain. Jones, it is true, betrayed surprise, so far as to lift his eyebrows, but he declared he knew all about it. Robinson averred that the project received his warmest support; White and Evans made eloquent bows, and Tracey indicated his adhesion by a hearty "all right."

Before the company separated, Mr. Hargrave knew he was to have the service of plate.

CHAPTER IV.

FAY IN TRANSITION.

THE situation of Mr. Grip's house exercised an attraction over Isaac Wingfield, who, without coming in contact with Ralph, or knowing of his co-residence, engaged the apartments occupied there by the Riverses. Both the Pastor and Ralph were won by the seclusion of the region, where they hoped to keep out of everybody's way, but failed to achieve this end. It happened that Mrs. Dorrington heard at the hotel the new destination of Ralph's luggage, and she paid a visit to the house to see its capabilities. The rooms did not quite come up to her wishes, but they afforded a base for the siege of Ralph, and as she was in town *incog.*, this

reconciled her to defaults. So she arranged with Mr. Grip at once, in order that she might take possession before she received Ralph's card, and, consequently, before she could be supposed to know he lived under the same roof.

But Mrs. Dorrington was not the exclusive patentee of the underground telegraph ; she had taught the mystery to Fay, and thus Fay came to hear that they shared the house with Isaac Wingfield as well as Ralph Granby. The information not being official, Fay left her mother in ignorance of it, nor did she, on the other hand, tell her of the visit she received from the Pastor prior to his journey into Devonshire.

This she chose to take as a confidence. She was not too anxious for her mother to know of the Pastor's breach with Alice, thinking it might interfere with her freedom of action, and to tell her of the visit might entail this disclosure.

The underground telegraph informed her of the Pastor's return, and at first she felt

uncertain about the result. Had Alice given him a meeting? and if so, did he, in spite of his purpose, seek a reconciliation, and did his appearance exercise a winning influence over Alice? After all, Alice might not have made up her mind. Fay turned these conjectures over and over, till she formed very severe opinions on the instability of man, and the weakness of woman. Her maid, the telegraphist, only reported of the Pastor that not much was seen of him in the house. Provided with a latch-key, he went in and out by stealth, and such time as he spent at home was passed in solitude. The information was scant, but it led Fay to the right conclusion. She understood the Pastor had fallen into that mood which counts all the uses of this world flat, stale, and unprofitable. Yes, he faltered even in the duties of his pastorate, going through them mechanically, without earnestness and without zeal. He omitted no detail, but it engaged not his heart, and in the very deliverance his voice was sometimes arrested

by early sympathies, luring him back to his mother church. Thus religious doubt added its torture to the scourge of grief. Once he rushed over to the Abbey in a kind of frenzy, and entered at the moment the choir rang out the words, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem." He understood no more; his ears seemed to close; and he was only aroused by the enunciation of one of those points of doctrine which had driven him from the Church.

From this time it was in the Abbey he spent the few afternoons of his leisure; not always in the choir, but wandering through the pile, so accordant with his own frame of mind. For where could he find a spot so associated with religious distraction, so conducive to religious calm? There, amidst architecture as solemn as beautiful, in a building sacred both as a temple and a memorial of forgotten ages, he trod ground venerated alike by Pagan and Christian, by the Druid and the Apostle, followed by priests, monks, Crusaders, Lollards, the men

of the Reformation, the Puritans of the Commonwealth, and whole generations of Churchmen. The community of successive possession took away the taint of sectarianism ; the edifice seemed to belong to all worshippers alike ; and he felt that here he might be simply a Christian.

Fay grieved to learn he was giving way to melancholy, feeling for him the pity which is akin to love—which needs but little culture to become love. She soon heard of his visits to the Abbey, which were made at a time when she usually went out with her mother. No place could be more suited for observing him unawares, as she designed to do, and she repeatedly excused herself from accompanying her mother that she might carry out this object. She was satisfied to follow the Pastor's steps, and watch him from a distance, sometimes among the monuments, sometimes from an obscure seat in the choir, and she caught from his air an inspiration of the intensity of his suffering which made her heart bleed. Strange re-

finements of passion, and stranger conversions—for the sympathies of love gave this worldly girl back to nature. She began to wrestle against her training in selfishness, and to renounce the sordid frivolity which overlaid and dwarfed her serious and tender thoughts. Far yet from being reclaimed, and at moments almost relapsing, her spirit had received the regenerative impulse, and must move on.

The change in her disposition did not escape her mother; for, as it progressed, Fay forgot to keep on her mask, and surprised Mrs. Dorrington with her new sentiments. Where had she picked up these strange views—from Tennysoning or from gipsying? Speculation begot suspicion. Why had Fay avoided going out with her lately? The underground telegraph brought no answer to this inquiry. Mrs. Dorrington must find out the reason for herself; and in default she determined to lose no time in carrying out her plans. In respect to the opening she made for Ralph with Mr. Har-

grave, which she designed to keep him on the spot, and by plunging him in the excitement of politics, to divert him from remembrance of Letty, she found Mr. Hargrave was riding the willing horse so hard, that for the last fortnight Ralph had only been able to get home to sleep. It became necessary, therefore, to take her great step of attacking Mr. Granby, with the view of wresting from him a settlement on Ralph, and at the same time his support of the marriage with Fay. But first she must discover Fay's mystery—for that Fay had a mystery seemed beyond doubt.

Thus it happened that one afternoon Mrs. Dorrington dogged Fay into the Abbey. After all, Fay's mystery seemed to be only a hankering for musical services, for she walked straight into the choir, and buried herself in a corner. The intervention of a pillar enabled Mrs. Dorrington to enter unobserved, and find a seat equally secluded. Here she listened to the choir, which well repaid attention, and by occasionally draw-

ing behind the pillar, she maintained a watch over Fay. But her satisfaction did not last long, for the service was still in progress when she looked round to find that Fay had disappeared.

CHAPTER V.

THE ABBEY CLOISTERS.

ISAAC WINGFIELD walked into the Abbey, and found the service had begun ; so, turning from the choir, he strolled along the noble pile in his usual abstraction. During the last fortnight his face had become familiar to the vergers, who looked upon him as an evangelical clergyman, and, as such, he was left more freedom than lay visitors. Thus he unexpectedly found himself in the cloisters.

He leant against a column, and his reverie took a colour from the spot. But he was not left long in solitude. With noiseless step Fay reached his side, and placed her hand on his arm.

"Isaac!"

He gave a little start, and looked up. Fay raised her veil, and he met her sympathising eyes, soft and deep, and mirroring the clearest blue.

"Is it you!" he exclaimed, with a forced smile.

"Yes, and I should scold you, only you are unhappy."

"Ah! you see how it is with me! Let it be my excuse for delaying to pay you a visit."

"The excuse is admitted, for I dare say you don't know you have been living three weeks in the same house with us."

"Is it possible?"

"Actually! though I can't complain of your not knowing it, when mamma hasn't found it out yet. I fancied you were better left quiet for a few days."

"Thoughtful and kind of you, Fay."

"But I don't intend you to be left so any longer. You mustn't let grief make you a monk," and here Fay cast a glance round—"shut you up in cloisters—you, Isaac Wing-

field, charged with great duties in life, and with mind and heart to fulfil them."

"Neither heart nor mind, Fay. I have forgotten both the sense of duty, and the desire for it."

"Because you have met one disappointment! Isn't this the spirit of a child fretting at the loss of a plaything, though he has a hundred remaining?"

"It may be; for the child's spirit is to expand into the man's. We are told of the man who had a hundred sheep, and who, having lost one, left the ninety-and-nine in the wilderness, and went in search of the one he had lost. This, too, was like a child. And when he found the straggler, he rejoiced more over this one than over the ninety-and-nine which had never strayed. But what is my case? I have *not* found the one. It is lost indeed—lost for ever!"

"Then say *dead*."

"Dead!" echoed the Pastor, recoiling.

"She is so to you—in effect," answered Fay, trembling at sight of the pain her

words inflicted. "Regard her as really dead, and you will come to endure the blow, though it may be more grievous at first. Think—yes, think she is in her grave."

"That would make me think the whole world a grave."

"For a time it may. But the world will rise out of this gloom, as it rises out of a fog, and will show you life is too vast to be filled by one emotion. Do we not change with every day? Are we not always gathering new experiences, and drawing from each fresh pain or pleasure. Come back to this world. Alice is dead!"

The Pastor stood speechless.

"I must leave you!" Fay whispered,—she had caught sight of the skirt of a lady's dress in the vista. "For heaven's sake, don't say you have seen me!"

At the moment the words were incomprehensible to the Pastor, his mind being engrossed by her remarks about Alice. But he had no time to realise her idea, for he was suddenly confronted by Mrs. Dorrington.

"Isaac!" she exclaimed, turning pale, "is Fay here? I am looking for her."

"Fay!" exclaimed the bewildered Pastor. "Where is she?" and he glanced down the cloister in an abstracted manner.

"You don't know?" said Mrs. Dorrington, uneasily.

"She can soon be found, I suppose," he answered. "I will search for her."

"We had better go in different directions," rejoined Mrs. Dorrington. "They told me she came up this way, but it may have been some other person. If you meet her, please to tell her I have gone home, and am expecting her."

"Certainly."

Only at this instant did the Pastor remember Fay's request that he would conceal their encounter. He now understood that she took flight to avoid being seen by her mother, and, though unable to imagine a motive for this proceeding, he felt glad he had undesignedly promoted her object; for his conscience would not have sanctioned a

reservation. This Mrs. Dorrington knew, and she placed as much reliance on his word as it was in her nature to feel in anything human ; but herself unconscious how sensitive is the habit of truth, she was far from certain that he had not resorted to some evasion. So she hastened home, in order that she might be there when Fay appeared, and put Fay to confusion by her presence.

But, as she ascended to the drawing-room, her ear caught unexpected sounds, nothing less than a lively air on the piano-forte, accompanied by Fay's voice. In fact, Fay was so incensed at being watched, that her temper overcame her rising sense of principle, and she determined to meet her mother with her own weapons. If there was to be sharp practice, it should not be all on one side.

"Why, mamma, back already!" she exclaimed, turning on her seat, as Mrs. Dorrington entered the room. "You have been out no time."

"Quite long enough," replied Mrs. Dor-

rington, curtly, as she sank in a chair.

"And pray where have you been?"

"Nowhere—except that I ran over to the service at the Abbey; but I didn't stay it out."

"I was at the service, too."

"Really? How funny we should be there together, without our knowing it. How was it you didn't see me?"

"I did see you."

"Then why were you so ill-natured as not to come and sit by me? Do you know I was seized with one of my headaches?"

"The verger told me you made that excuse for getting out; but your head doesn't seem to be very bad now, to judge from the clatter you have been making."

"Perhaps you won't care to hear my head was relieved directly I left the choir, and walked up the Abbey?"

"A strange place for taking the air, if that was your design. Somebody like you was seen going into the cloisters."

"Mercy!" exclaimed Fay. "I hope I

shall never go there—at any rate, garbed as I was to-day, in a veil.”

“Take care you don’t come to that—for to the veil you are doomed if you don’t accept the destiny I have marked out for you. And now you may go back to your headache again, if you like, and call it heartache.”

“Really, mamma, you are quite ferocious. How have I provoked it?”

For a moment Mrs. Dorrington made no answer; then she said—

“It is better we should understand each other. Now play me something. No fine sentiment, I beg. You were singing something lively just now.”

“And *so* sentimental!” replied Fay.
“You shall hear.”

And, running her fingers over the instrument, she dashed into a tune, accompanying it with these words :—

“In the world there is one thing my own,
You may say it is but a trifle—
Neither manor, nor mansion of stone,
Nor treasure, for rovers to rifle :

For I have, I confess, but my heart—
I wish to make no fuss about it;
But from it I never shall part,
For I really can't live without it.

"Yours to tend in exchange is all vain,
While still in your breast yours is beating,
So the subject don't mention again,—
At least, until our next meeting;
Then the reasons in full I shall state,
Why my own is lighter to carry;
And if still you will rush upon fate,
I suppose—suppose we must marry."

"That is all very well for a ditty," remarked Mrs. Dorrington, as Fay finished, "but everybody knows hearts have nothing to do with marriage."

"*We shall see about that,*" thought Fay.

CHAPTER VI.

A MASKED BATTERY.

FOR the moment Fay had lulled Mrs. Dorrington's suspicions, but they were not stamped out. Ready to be alarmed on the slightest ground, at present she could fix on nothing to show that Fay swerved from her mercenary training. Fay, it is true, evinced a disinclination to the match with Ralph; but as she liked Ralph himself, and as he possessed every quality to attract, she would no doubt get over this feeling when thrown more in his society. And they were now likely to meet often, for a lull in the session relieved Ralph from his press of work; he discovered the Dorringtons were in the same house, and he paid them several visits.

Mrs. Dorrington thought, from what she observed, that not only was he making way with Fay, but that Fay was captivating him. She now began to scheme to throw them together alone, intending so to entangle Ralph that, even if he avoided falling in love, he would find himself engaged to Fay in honour. Then her own management would accomplish the rest.

Fay was in expectation of Ralph's appearance to escort them to view the House of Lords, when her mother entered in carriage costume.

"Surely it isn't time to be ready, mama?" cried Fay in surprise, and consulting her watch. "No! Ralph Granby said three o'clock, and it wants a quarter."

"I am going to Mr. Simmer's," replied Mrs. Dorrington.

"You forget you asked Ralph to take us to see the House of Lords."

"What I forgot was my appointment with Mr. Simmer. Tell Ralph so, and make him stop till I come back."

Fay blushed, betraying penetration of the device.

"I shall tell him your message," she answered, "but I can put no constraint on him to stay, if he doesn't choose."

"I daresay he will choose, on the very lightest pressure," smiled Mrs. Dorrington, "for I see he chooses to do as you like. There is the carriage. Perhaps I shall be back before he comes."

And Mrs. Dorrington went off.

For a few minutes Fay sat meditating; then she heard approaching steps, and the servant ushered in Ralph. Fay was a little embarrassed, remembering her mother's design.

"Mama has been obliged to go to her lawyer's," she said; "and has left her apologies for you, and is so unconscionable as to wish you to wait till she returns."

"Unconscionable!" cried Ralph; "I think it very considerate of her. She might have left word for me at the door to call in half-an-hour, and I should have gone strolling

about in the sun, looking at my thumbs, and—and—”

“Quite forgetting you were to take us to the House of Lords,” laughed Fay.

“No, but thinking how pleasantly the time might be spent in your drawing-room chatting with you. Talking of time, how plain you hear the chimes here.” They were this moment striking. “Ah, and there comes the hour—one! two! three! First a song, and then a sermon.”

“The song is very clear, but how do you make out the sermon—in the flight of time?”

“No, in the dong, dong, dong!”

“But sermons are not all dong.”

“They are all long, and they have only one note throughout.”

“But if they are good?”

“Well, you may have too much of a good thing,” said Ralph. “To hear it strike three may stir us up; we are admonished there is still a great deal to be done, but when it

comes to striking twelve, we feel we ought to be asleep."

"That is at night, and after the season. At present, twelve at night is just my lively time, and twelve in the day is the time we go out shopping."

"Both very suitable occasions for a sermon, at midnight against the vanity of dancing, and at noon against the vanity of dress."

"Pray let me hear what could be said on such subjects."

"You have heard it a hundred times."

"Only at church, and what is said there is never attended to by anybody, or how different we should all be! But we take notice of what is said in the drawing-room."

"Then I might set you against dancing and dress, which I wouldn't do for the world."

"So you don't consider them vanity, after all?"

"Vanity of vanities? isn't all vanity?"

He spoke with a smile, but his tone was bitterness itself.

But here Mrs. Dorrington appeared.

"What are you two discussing so keenly?" she said, presenting her hand to Ralph.

"Mr. Granby was moralising, that is all," cried Fay.

"How well you did it!" Mrs. Dorrington observed to Ralph. "I really thought outside it was my nephew Isaac preaching."

Fay laughed and slightly blushed.

"I had no idea it was so good," remarked Ralph. "Would you like me to go on?"

Fay shook her lovelock. "Remember, too much of a good thing," she said, and she slid out of the room to dress.

Mrs. Dorrington sank in a seat by Ralph.

"Do you know your uncle is in town?" she asked.

"I know nothing about his movements," answered Ralph, unconcernedly.

"It isn't wise to be so indifferent about them," replied Mrs. Dorrington; "for they

are still of importance to you," her voice dropped, "*and to me too!*"

Ralph looked up.

"To you?" he said, in a tone subdued as her own.

She was silent for an instant.

"You have doubtless wondered he never married?" she then said. "Did it ever occur to you that he might be married already?"

"Can it be possible?"

"Too possible, for I—*I am his wife.*"

Ralph in his surprise, started to his feet.

"The marriage," continued Mrs. Dorrington, "is unknown, because I never bore his name, and parted with him just after the ceremony." The coincidence with his own case again startled Ralph. "You can understand there may be a reason for this, without my saying what it is?"

"Perfectly."

"Some day you shall know it—*when it may be told in safety,*" in these words Mrs. Dorrington once more lowered her voice.

"Enough to know now that my alienation

from the uncle doesn't tell against the nephew—*my* nephew."

Ralph bent his head. "Certainly you have not allowed it to do so," he said.

"Well," pursued Mrs. Dorrington, "I mentioned you had a claim on the Granby estate. Are you willing that I should see your uncle, and assert this claim for you?"

"If I have a claim, could it not be best asserted by myself?" answered Ralph, determined neither to be drawn into Mrs. Dorrington's quarrel with his uncle, nor to be a party to subjecting him to any coercion: at the same time, careful in the tone of his voice, to avoid wounding Mrs. Dorrington.

"It is easy to state the objection to your appearance," replied Mrs. Dorrington, with a slight contraction of her brow. "The facts are known only to myself, and I alone can bring your uncle to acknowledge their weight. Once for all, do you accept my mediation?"

"I fear you will think me ungrateful in

saying I could only accept it on conditions."

"Name them."

"In the first place, I couldn't suffer my uncle to be put under any pressure, and, secondly, I mustn't be put under any myself."

As he spoke they were rejoined by Fay.

"*I agree to your proposal*," answered Mrs. Dorrington, darting at the same time a significant look at Fay. "You will be so glad, dear," she cried, to Fay, "that Ralph and I have come to an explanation. You have understood it all for a long time, haven't you?" And she patted Fay's cheek, which first flamed, and then paled, showing her mother that the words conveyed the false impression she intended—the impression that the explanation with Ralph, the *proposal* to which she agreed, referred to the projected marriage.

Fay asked herself whether this could be. Had her mother so managed as to draw Ralph into her scheme, and was

she, Fay, engaged by proxy, without knowing it, and without being permitted to answer for herself. She looked from one to the other, and her heart sank in her breast. Her mother seemed transformed into a basilisk, fascinating with a glance.

"I am so tired, I shall leave you to go to the House of Lords by yourselves," cried Mrs. Dorrington. "You know, Ralph, *that is all very proper now.*"

"And I am sure it is very pleasant," replied Ralph.

Fay could say nothing and they walked away together, under a shower of Mrs. Dorrington's smiles.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS.

THE step across the great bustling thoroughfare between George Place and Victoria Tower afforded little opportunity for conversation and less for observation, but the time was long enough for Ralph to discover Fay had become very quiet. This led him to speak with more feeling, and to be more alert in his attentions, conduct which confirmed her belief that he was pledged to the marriage. Still, such civilities from a handsome young fellow could not but be agreeable, and they even prompted a degree of resignation, particularly as Fay remembered the threat of the convent, and knew besides, that her mother was capable of putting it in execution.

There is nothing to awaken sentiment in the palace of the peerage. The noble entry, the gorgeous chamber, the gilding, the frescoes, and even the throne, though wanting no element of splendour, all wear an unsuggestive newness. Such blooming magnificence can have no associations, and memory sighs for the gloomy chamber of old, which began its life with the old barons, and only ended it with Chatham.

"What do you think of it?" Ralph said to Fay.

"It is all very nice," she answered.

"Exactly. It is like going to see a young couple who have just set up an establishment. Everything looks so fresh you are afraid to sit on the chairs, or walk on the carpets."

"I can't say I ever felt so timid."

"Perhaps you never observed how your movements were watched. I have caught the bridegroom looking at my boots to see if I had matted them well, and the bride note my imprint on the antimacassar."

"I have always found them better occupied than that."

"With each other, perhaps?"

"No, but with me; the lady in scrutinizing my dress, and considering what I should think of hers, the gentleman in marking how I was thrown in the shade by his wife, and how I wished myself in her shoes."

"What happy couples you have met with."

"Yes, and unhappy."

"And all engaged in the same pleasant way?"

"Not all. The unhappy were busy either in trying to conceal their misery, or in stabbing each other with polite sarcasms."

"Unfortunately such things are," said Ralph, in a graver tone.

"How many have sat there"—and Fay glanced at the Peeresses' Gallery—"who could bear witness! Women there have looked down on the grandest pageant in the world—seen the lords in their robes, and the Queen on her throne, and felt the plumes

of nobility waving over their own brow—and, in the midst of this, have thought of some home where they would gladly struggle through life with the man they loved—and refused !”

“And if they had chosen that fate,” remarked Ralph, “they would have sighed for the Peeresses’ Gallery.”

“You don’t believe in happy marriages for affection ?” said Fay, with a half reproachful glance.

“Not for those who have preferred another destiny. Be assured, they are of a disposition to be unhappy in any case, and will always grieve for what they haven’t got. If they are unwilling to make sacrifices before marriage, when their love is in the stage of enthusiasm, they would never be content to endure them after.”

“They may be only too willing, and be prevented by force. I don’t mean they are dragged to church, but they are overruled by talk. Talk is force, and may be made torture, dinning a thing constantly into one’s ears, racking the nerves, and keeping

one in a fret. Can't you imagine this going on for days, and weeks, and months, sometimes for years, till at last a girl yields in despair. What else can she do?"

"In the last resort she might appeal to the man she is required to marry."

"You think so?" And Fay raised her eyes to Ralph's face.

"Could there be any reason against it?" answered Ralph, attracted by her gaze.

Fay's eyes were soft, even in her worldliest mood; Ralph's were earnest, but open and kindly. And these eyes had never communed before.

"I think," said Fay, dropping her glance, "there might be two objections. First, there is the possibility that the suitor might persist, and then what would be the future of his wife, when he knew from her own lips she had never loved him?"

"It would be rather awkward for both parties, but which would have the worst of it I can't pretend to say. But what is your second objection?"

"Why, the suitor might himself be en-

gaging, when there would not only be a desire to spare him humiliation, but a lurking consciousness that things might have been worse."

"You have completely shut out appeal."

They heard a step, and looking up, Ralph perceived his uncle.

Mr. Granby ran his eye over Fay from head to foot, and at first did not recall her features. But suddenly he caught the likeness to her mother, and his face flushed; at the same time he turned to Ralph, holding out his hand.

"Have you received my note?" he said in a conciliatory tone.

Ralph was passing with a bow, but could not repel this overture.

"I was not expecting one," he replied coldly; "I shall probably find it at my rooms."

"It is only to ask you to come and dine with me to-morrow. But it may be better"—here he again glanced at Fay—"if I see you for half-an-hour in the morning."

"I doubt if that is practicable," answered Ralph, no way inclined for an interview.

"You must make it so, for nothing can be of such importance to you as the matter we have to arrange, and *which will arrange everything else*. I shall expect to see you at twelve o'clock."

The Squire raised his chin, and walked on, without waiting for reply.

"Do you know who that is?" Ralph said to Fay.

"I seem to have seen him before," she answered, "but it must have been long, long ago—longer than I can remember. He comes into my memory like an old dream."

"He is my uncle, Mr. Granby."

They were passing into the lobby, and Fay looked round with an eager glance. The Squire felt a kindred curiosity, and turning at the same moment, met her gaze with a stare. Fay smiled, and the Squire stared harder than ever, but it was at vacancy; Fay had passed out of sight.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. DORRINGTON ALARMED.

RETURNING home, Fay and Ralph heard voices as they reached the drawing-room door, and, on entering, found Mrs. Dorrington talking with Isaac Wingfield.

"What do you think?" she cried to Fay, "Isaac has gone back to his old love."

Fay sank in a chair.

"I was not aware there had been any estrangement," observed Ralph, as he took Isaac's hand. "But it could only have been a little one, and only end happily."

This was not the suggestion of Isaac's face, for he looked as if Mrs. Dorrington had dealt him a blow, and Ralph had followed it up.

"I fear my aunt may give you a false impression," he said, as soon as he found voice. "I had better tell you seriously what has occurred, for indeed it is for me a serious event. I have resigned my pastorate."

"That isn't all," cried Mrs. Dorrington; "he is coming back to the church. And Fay hasn't a word to say to it, or to him either."

"I have a great deal to say on both subjects, if he will sit here," cried Fay, "but I am so tired that I can't get up, now I am in a chair."

"Tired with a walk across the road!" exclaimed Mrs. Dorrington, satirically.

"You don't consider how we have dawdled," rejoined Fay. "And then we have had an adventure. Ralph, you must tell mama, for all this commotion has taken away my breath."

"We met Mr. Granby," said Ralph, to Mrs. Dorrington, who, at sound of the Squire's name, gave him all her attention, and Fay was thus free to converse with the Pastor!

"I hope I shall not appear to be blaming my aunt," the Pastor said to her, "for she was evidently overjoyed at my meditated return to the church, and her manner of mentioning it may have been caused by this feeling. But you saw how she misled Ralph Granby, and you will conceive how I was shocked by his mistake, so close on her remark."

"I understand your feelings, from the effect on myself," answered Fay, whose emotion, however, had been prompted by her falling into the same error as Ralph. "We must school ourselves against such surprises, and in returning to your old ways of thought you make a great step, for you are carried out of associations which constantly reminded you of her who is gone."

"Gone! Ah, I remember!—true, too true!"

"And when you bring yourself to view it in this light, as a bereavement by death, don't you find your loss more supportable?"

"In a certain manner," answered the

Pastor, after a scarcely perceptible pause. "To the Christian, the idea of death offers a consolation which takes away its sting, and so far it soothes my thoughts of Alice. I rest on the hope of meeting her again in a higher existence."

"Forget that—banish it from your mind," said Fay, eagerly. "The notion of meeting again can only prolong your misery. You will never meet again with the same susceptibilities. I say—never. Then why tantalise yourself with a fanciful future, when you live, and move, and have your being in the present?"

"Fay, you amaze me! Are you so wrapped in the present that you ignore the future? Where do you find those words—live, and move, and have your being? Were they not used to call the Athenians from the very worldliness you now press upon me?"

"I don't wish you to be worldly," rejoined Fay, subduing her tone. "I only remind you that you are in the world, and have a great deal to do in it. And will you

find more consolation in dreaming of meeting Alice in heaven, than in helping me and others to the hope of being received there?"

"You show me I have been hasty to condemn you, without seeing the beam in myself. Would I could as easily amend my deficiency!"

"That is for time," answered Fay, with a sigh—for she reflected this relief might come to the Pastor, when events had enthralled herself.

Their earnest colloquy was unheeded by Mrs. Dorrington, in her eager interrogation of Ralph.

"Did you and your uncle speak?" she asked, with a bland air.

"He stopped me, and shook hands," replied Ralph, "or I should have passed on."

"And he couldn't have complained, as you were walking with a lady. Did you introduce Fay?"

"I hardly felt warranted in doing so, without your authority."

"A good answer."

"I hope you consider it a good reason, too, though there were other difficulties, as you will imagine. However, I have no doubt he saw she was your daughter."

"I don't know," answered Mrs. Dorrington, musingly. "They haven't met since she was five years old."

"But he couldn't overlook her resemblance to you."

"Not well," smiled Mrs. Dorrington, with a proud glance at the mirror. "I believe anyone can see it. And was he friendly?"

"Extremely so; indeed, in a greater degree than I could reciprocate. But he said he has something of importance to tell me, and I can't refuse to hear what it is."

"Leave your cause with me," rejoined Mrs. Dorrington, quickly, "and don't go near him. He will only regard your visit as a piece of cringing, and I can demand as your right what you must accept from him as a favour, and then can't receive without forfeiting your independence."

"I shall receive nothing from him, and could accept nothing," said Ralph, in emphatic tones. "And he can't regard my visit as a submission, when it is made on his invitation, very urgently put."

"Urgently!" exclaimed Mrs. Dorrington, with changing colour.

"In as strong words as he could use."

"Words not to be repeated?" smiled Mrs. Dorrington.

"They only mystify," answered Ralph, in polite evasion, yet speaking what he felt. "But I shall know all at twelve o'clock to-morrow."

"Has he fixed that hour?"

"Yes.

Mrs. Dorrington now knew all Ralph had to tell, and found leisure to look over at Fay, whom she drew out of her aside with the Pastor, and the conversation became general. But it did not last long, as Ralph, in his character of secretary, was called to attend a political dinner, and Isaac Wingfield departed at the same time.

CHAPTER IX.

FAY PROMISES.

INSTINCT told Fay that something disquieted her mother, and, as soon as they were left alone, she sat down to the pianoforte that she might not be obliged to note the fact. She was the more anxious on this point, because she believed the cloud arose out of the scheme for marrying her to Ralph, and there could be no doubt her mother's plans would be embarrassed by a reconciliation between Ralph and his uncle, which, judging from Mr. Granby's manner, now seemed probable. But Fay felt it was not a moment for her to obtrude herself. Her part was to remain passive, and leave her mother to take action.

But this was far from being the aim of Mrs. Dorrington, who wished Fay to be a confederate, not a puppet, esteeming her co-operation necessary to success. Alive to the difficulties in the way of the marriage, she had faith in the power of an attractive girl over the heart of a man in any and every situation; but she conceived this power to be greatest when man, so impatient in affairs of the heart, was humbled by disappointment in another quarter. But what availed the gift of charming, if it were not exercised, or if it were exercised only in a half-hearted way, without a purpose? The more Mrs. Dorrington turned the subject in her mind, the more clearly she saw this was the course adopted by Fay, and she decided there should now be a change.

"Do stop that din, Fay," she said. "My head is distracted with it."

Fay left the pianoforte, and took up a book.

"Have you nothing to tell me?" resumed Mrs. Dorrington.

"Nothing very pressing," replied Fay; "and I thought it might wait till you were disposed to talk."

"Which is precisely my present disposition, particularly as your words excite my curiosity, seeming to hint at what is mysterious, though, as you say, it may not be pressing."

Mrs. Dorrington spoke with her satiric smile, which always unnerved Fay.

"It relates to Isaac's engagement," Fay answered, slightly colouring.

"There is nothing in it to make you blush, I hope."

"Nonsense, mama!" cried Fay, vexation giving her courage. "How can you tease so? Somehow I have got unhinged, and have been blushing all day, so pray don't put any construction on that. As to Isaac's engagement, he simply asked me to tell you it was broken off."

Mrs. Dorrington fixed her eyes on Fay, as if she would pierce her through.

"Not broken off by himself? not spon-

taneously!" she then said. "He loved her! I say it deliberately, if ever man loved woman, Isaac Wingfield loved this girl. Who, then, has come between them?"

Fay shrugged her shoulders.

"You don't know?" cried her mother, with the same searching look.

"From what he said, I have no reason to suppose anyone has come between them," Fay now answered; "but, if so, the influence has been exercised on the lady, not on Isaac; for it is by her the engagement has been terminated."

Mrs. Dorrington was mollified by this explanation, which allayed her suspicion that Fay, intending to supplant Alice, had herself effected the breach.

"Then it is all the better for Isaac, and I think he is well out of it," she observed. "But why didn't he tell me about it himself, instead of devolving the thing on you?"

"Because you were engaged with Ralph Granby all the time."

"And I had much rather Ralph Granby

had been engaged with you, and I with Isaac. But now tell me about the House of Lords."

"There isn't much to say about it, except that it is very grand," replied Fay, "and you must really go and see it."

Mrs. Dorrington received this speech with a derisive laugh.

"Can you pretend I wanted you to describe the building?" she exclaimed, bitterly. "That shows how little heart you have put in this business, which is of such importance to you, involving the whole course of your life. As for the House of Lords, I might now have a seat in the peeresses' gallery, if I had not, at your age, been too much like yourself, and instead of taking the husband my mother chose for me, married your father."

Fay looked up in wonder.

"And what do you think was the end of my romances?" continued Mrs. Dorrington. "Within two years your father struck me with a horsewhip, and left me for ever."

"Dear mama!" exclaimed Fay, agitatedly.

This touch of affection soothed Mrs. Dorrington. She bent over Fay, and kissed her forehead.

"My child, men are capricious," she said, tenderly; "capricious and selfish. They call us so, but we only imitate their example. I have met some of the best men in the world; and, believe me, not the best of these was worth the wreck of a woman's life. Be guided, then, by me. Let me choose your husband, knowing the disposition that can make you happy, a disposition like your own—gay, affectionate, and trained to the uses of society."

"I don't care so much about society, mama," faltered Fay.

"Well, that you may do as you like about," pursued Mrs. Dorrington, in eager accents. "You have only to obey me, and you will obtain a position in which you can either command society or decline it. In a word, you will ultimately be the mistress of Granby Hall."

"I really wish you would be more explicit, mama," and Fay's eyes brimmed with tears. "You spoke this afternoon of an explanation with Ralph Granby; you now urge my marriage with him; but he has neither told me the nature of your explanation, nor hinted at any proposal. What am I to think? what would you have me say? If he has proposed for me to you, tell me so! Then I may at least speak on the subject without indelicacy. But now—"

"Now, dear Fay, you are only asked to encourage him—to put out your power to please. The explanation, as you call it, was between him and myself, and is not to embarrass you, but to smooth your way. In a day or two I shall tell you more. Meanwhile, I have your promise."

"For what?" asked Fay, despairingly.

"Obedience!"

Fay bent her head.

CHAPTER X.

BRADLEY DECIDES WHAT TO DO.

WHILE Ralph was involved in these adventures in London, Chesney was the scene of events fruitful of consequence to Letty, and destined in the end to bear importantly on Ralph also.

Ralph's visit to the farm infuriated Bradley, whom it confirmed in his suspicion that Mr. Rivers and his wife, while protesting opposition, had secretly favoured the marriage with Letty, and were now plotting for its renewal. But every fresh obstacle to his passion only made him pursue Letty more fiercely. This disposition had long blinded him to the distinctions between right and wrong, and deadened his best

feelings, and it now began to shake his reason.

He fell into such a paroxysm of rage, hate, and self-deception, that it became a mania. His old notion that the powers of darkness were entangling his soul by an overpowering temptation, took stronger root in his breast, and he saw himself battling with Satan as well as human enemies. Yet, strange to say, he no longer remembered the taint in Bet Kedge. Her witchcraft, a sin his sect held in abomination, he even brought himself to look upon as something scriptural, or he altogether shut his eyes upon it, and implicitly followed her counsels.

Thus it was that the first moonless night found him standing in Mr. Rivers's meadow, in the rear of the rick-yard. Bet had told him to come to that spot, in such season, to gather, from the impressions then made on his mind, "*what he was to do.*" He had been haunted by that phrase. *To do!* What *could* he do? He had exhausted his invention, his powers of persuasion, and

even his endurance, and was no nearer success : indeed, saw it more distant than ever. He had entertained an expectation that the reduction of Mr. Rivers's income would induce him to urge Letty, now she was free, to seek a release from stigma, by accepting his suit, and the comfortable home it secured, but although the farmer was now further weighted with the expenses of the divorce, he still held back—nay, hankered after the old bond, the bond of iniquity. Nothing would bring him to a godly mind but the pinch of poverty, and from this he held a provision in his plant and stock. Bradley's eye swept in fury the looming outlines of rick, and barn, and stable, and cattle-shed, crowding round the side of the house, when he suddenly remembered that Mr. Rivers had run out his insurance. The recollection brought a lump in his throat. He gasped for breath, and his knees tottered. A moment might render Mr. Rivers a beggar—*if he fired a rick!*

The thought flashed through his mind like

lightning, and as if it had given the lightning's shock, his hand flew to the match. There was no pause. He never even looked at what he did, but shut his eyes, then turned round and darted away.

It was very dark, but he was so sure-footed that, though running at full speed, he never stumbled, and had nearly reached the coppice, when he suddenly felt paralyzed. Though his back was towards the rick-yard, *he saw the fire!* At first there came a flicker over the field, and his flesh crept; but presently he perceived the very colour of the grass, the leaves on the trees, the neighbouring road, and then the distant country. He raised his eyes despairingly to heaven: the sky was in flames!

His ear now caught *sounds*, bearing the same import, and striking his soul with horror. There were neighings of horses, wild 'lowings of cows, outcries, screams and shrieks! He mustered all his strength, and rushed into the coppice.

"Ise told 'ee it 'ud come into yer mind

what to do," cried a voice, as his knocking knees refused to bear him further.

There, right in his path, stood Bet Kedge, exultingly contemplating the fire, and in its glare, which fell full on her face and form, looking a witch indeed.

"Hag, it is your work!" exclaimed the maddened Bradley, as if her appearance struck the scales from his eyes, and showed him her real character.

"That won't get 'ee off, if yer put on trial for 't," rejoined Bet. "And thee's best keep a civil tongue in yer cheek, or thou'll soon be in gaol, steward as you be."

"You she-devil, you lay it to me, do you?"

"And thee'll deny it, eh?" cried Bet, with a demoniac laugh. "Look there! look at it." And she pointed towards the rick-yard.

In his distraction Bradley swung round, and now first beheld the conflagration—for such the fire had become. A dozen burning ricks, with barns vomiting smoke and fire,

which curled round the tarred timber of the other out-buildings, formed a terrible spectacle, but what rivetted the eye of the incendiary was flames shooting up from the dwelling-house. The fabric itself was only partly seen, smoke wrapping it round, but gaps of it stood out plain in the surrounding flare. Already groups of people had gathered in front, and the Chesney engine came on at a gallop, and, as the gale brought up the conflict of sounds, Bradley felt as if Letty and her father were perishing by his hand.

"Ise hope our bonny dear be safe out on't," muttered Bet, hoarsely, as if she guessed his thoughts, "or all her pride won't help she, and her'll be spoilt for a corpse. Thou'll have to give me good hush to stop my babbling this, Muster Bradley."

"The Lord keep me from staining my hands with your blood!" exclaimed Bradley, flying at her throat.

"Ise keep thee myself from that," screamed Bet, skipping aside, and bringing down her

broomstick smartly on his knuckles. "And now thee shall have it in yer face."

Bradley avoided the blow, but, in the movement, fell backward, and when he regained his feet, Bet was gone.

But he forgot her existence. As he stood up, the blazing farm burst on his gaze, and he remembered nothing else. Should he rush down and proclaim himself the incendiary, and then plunge into the flames? Alas! they would be to him the flames everlasting, the bottomless pit, hell itself! To escape their glare he darted into the depths of the coppice. But here he remembered that far denser woods could not hide our first parents from their offended Maker. In his frenzied imagination he saw them come trembling forth: he heard the awful voice of the Judge, and, with a smothered cry, he reeled senseless to the earth.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRE.

LETTY was lying awake, as she too often passed her nights, and with closed eyes clung to that pursuit of sleep which most surely keeps it away. The memories of her little life, as compressed in the past year, supplied a further hindrance, making her eyes throb under their lids. Ralph, Harry, Bradley, the Squire, Bet Kedge, and her stepmother, her visit to town, the Abbey, the Divorce Court, Mr. Simmer, and Mr. Grip, rose confusedly in her mind, arousing emotions as inextricable. Under this excitement she often sprang from her pillow, and went to the window, to gaze up in melancholy at the stars, in search of

her old serenity. On this night she was yielding to such an impulse when she became sensible of a strong smell of burning. Presently the house rang with an indescribable noise. She leaped to the floor, and hastily drew on her dress, which she had hardly done, when her father burst into the room.

"The house is on fire!" he exclaimed, catching her in his arms. "We have but a moment to save our lives."

He half carried her into the passage.

"Where are the others, papa?" she cried. "Let me help you to find them."

"Your mother and the girls have got out."

Letty knew that by the girls he meant the servants.

"And where is Alice?" she asked, stopping.

"I am going for her now," replied her father. "I shall have time to get her down the other stairs. Don't hesitate, Letty. Run at once to the front door."

"I can't—I can't leave Alice—and you, dear, dear papa."

Smoke stifled her voice, and Mr. Rivers hurried her along, and sprang with her down the stairs, bearing her into the garden. Then he darted back for Alice, while Letty, confused and dizzy, was seized by Jack Reeve, who rushed up, and led her to her stepmother. Mrs. Rivers welcomed her with a cry, and Letty threw her arms round her neck. It was their first embrace since her childhood.

"I wouldn't leave till I saw you safe," cried Mrs. Rivers. "Now let us go to one of the cottages, and offer up thanks, for we have been delivered with a merciful hand."

"You go, *mother*," replied Letty, for the first time recognising their affinity. "You are trembling with cold. I will wait, and bring papa."

"That may be better," answered Mrs. Rivers, "for I am really too worn to stay, and I know you will be a watch upon him."

Not till this moment did Letty look

round. Some labourers were dragging furniture out of the house by the lower windows, others were running wildly about, and groups of people, both men and women, approached along the road. But Letty saw nothing but the flame-encircled dwelling and the rick-yard behind, now one blaze. The wind whirled the burning hay in the air, in wreaths and rings, here a glowing red, here white as moonlight, while clouds of black smoke rolled away over the meadow, hiding it from view. Jack Reeve, now himself a farmer, had managed to break open the stables, and let out the horses, which, gathering in a body, galloped up and down the meadow like a troop of cavalry. Letty heard the thud of their hoofs on the grass, rising above their wild neighs, and the din of all the animal life of the farm, left in the confusion to perish. But what she heard and saw and imagined was all the impression of an instant, taken in by a glance. Her thoughts flew after her father and Alice, and she considered the terrors of

the conflagration solely in relation to them. It seemed a reproach to her that she should stand there in safety while they were in peril, yet she felt that to put herself in jeopardy would only distract her father, and, perhaps, cost the lives of all. So she curbed her impulse to dart back to the house till she saw a figure reel out of the front door, and fall upon Jack Reeve, who, after helping to get out movables from the lower rooms, was now, with his associates, retreating from the advancing flames. Letty almost made one bound to the spot, and in a moment her hands were locked round her father's, while Jack hurriedly drew him from the smoke and heat into the fresher air. He revived almost directly, and gave a despairing look at Letty, whose heart too well understood its meaning.

"Lost! oh, can she be lost?—my Alice!" she cried, in agony.

"Alice Mead!" exclaimed Jack; "*is she there?*"

Letty answered with a cry, pointing to an

upper window, where the figure of a girl, who could be no one but Alice, at this instant appeared. Jack was gone before Letty looked round. Presently she saw him rearing a ladder against the end of the house, for the window below Alice's was gushing forth flames, and at that point cut off access. Alice seemed to understand this, as she withdrew from sight, evidently in search of another outlet. Her disappearance greatly excited the crowd below, prompting them to hail with a shout the Chesney engine, which now dashed up, and which soon poured a stream of water on the house. Mr. Rivers was again among the most active, though, like Letty, he had but one thought, and that was to save Alice. Indeed, no hope remained of preserving any part of the house, and the rick-yard was only a crater of fire, occasionally flaring up to the sky like a volcano. The wind brought from it such blasts of heat, that the strong rustics, though half stripped, constantly fell back, unable to support the glow.

Jack had mounted the ladder, and, reaching the top, got on the coping, and crept along till he came over Alice's window. Then he dropped down his feet, and lowered himself the length of his arm, while he fastened the other arm round the water-pipe, and, with a swing forward, kicked in the window-frame. Hardly did Letty catch the crash of the glass, before he flung himself through.

Even in the universal excitement, the spectators hailed this daring feat with a buzz of wonder, which broke from all, and Letty felt as if she could not breathe till she saw the issue. But Jack was only at the beginning of his enterprise. He fell into the room with such a shock, that, strong as he was, he lay powerless for a moment. It required an effort to stumble to his feet, when he found Alice was not in the room, and the open door showed she had fled. He flew to the passage, calling out her name; for, walled from the glare outside, here all was dark. Through the

smoke he groped along, feeling the heat of an oven, and insensibly closing his ears against the crackling flames, the falling timbers, and the splitting of walls. Could Alice have made for the roof? If so, he had come the wrong way. But it was now too late to turn, for a rush of smoke blocked the staircase, and wrecked his last hope. Was there nothing to be done? His brain rocked; his heart seemed bursting in his breast; and it remained to him but to stay and perish; for to escape without Alice he cared not. The end must soon be, for as the smoke thickened, he found it pain to draw breath, and he reeled back under a sense of suffocation. Then his foot touched something on the floor. It was a human body—the body of Alice—and he caught her to his breast. She had fallen in a faint, but the movement in his arms recalled her to sensibility; and, assured she was alive, he recovered the strength of a giant. But it now seemed impossible to find the door of the bedroom, which, as the fire had reached

both staircases, afforded the only opening for escape. A lurid whiteness began to tinge the smoke, giving it the appearance of a fog, and betokening the proximity of flames. But, though whiter, the darkness was as dense as before, reminding Jack that a false step might plunge him into the passage, which threaded the old house like a labyrinth, but which led nowhere. Still he moved on, murmuring a word of encouragement to Alice.

"Is it Jack?" she answered. "Jack!"

Low as she spoke, and in accents choked by the dense air, the words came in a tone that thrilled Jack's breast. He made no reply, even by movement, but her voice gave him inspiration. With one rush he found the door, and gained the window. The air rang with a tumult of sounds, but he heard only the splash of water on the hissing walls, and a voice calling to him from above, immediately over the window—

"Lift her up, Jack!"

The draught had given wings to the fire,

and it now burst into the room ; but cool, collected, and with full knowledge that this was the critical moment of all, Jack raised Alice as if she were a feather. Mr. Rivers bent down from the coping, and clutched her round, while Jack scrambled up at her side. They had still to pass along the coping to the ladder, and another instant might render this impossible. Hundreds of eyes watched them from below, but two of the spectators watched in agony—with suppressed breath, and gaze entranced. Letty had been joined by Alice's father. Hearing of the fire, he came off in a chaise to carry them all to his own house, and arrived just at the crisis. He took his stand by Letty, without speaking. She laid her hand on his arm, and besought him to remain there.

“We can pray for them,” she added, despairingly.

The flames now appeared on the roof, bursting up from behind, and twining round the chimneys like fiery serpents ; they

spouted from every window, and were gradually closing round the walls. Light as of day fell on the upturned faces of the spectators, on the fields, the road, and, more than all, on the three figures on the coping. Suddenly a volume of smoke hid them from view. A scream rose to Letty's lips, but she remembered who stood at her side, and denied it utterance. All subsided into the same silence, and sound there was none, but the roll of the pumping, the hiss of the ejected water, and the unintermitted thud of the horses' hoofs, as they still galloped about the meadow. But then rose a mighty shout, the engine stopped, the crowd rushed bodily forward, and Letty was clinging round Alice, then round her father, and uttering frantic exclamations of joy. Mr. Mead bore Alice to the chaise, in which he next seated Letty, and covered them both with cloaks. What he said to Jack was incoherent, but Jack knew it was an outpouring of gratitude. And as the chaise drove away, this came also from a gentler

voice, low and faint, yet echoing through
his breast—

“God bless you, John Reeve!”

It was the voice of Alice.

CHAPTER XII.

LOOKING ROUND.

NEXT morning found Mr. Mead astir early. He sent an injunction to Letty and Alice to remain in bed, as a precaution against the consequences of the night's exposure, and he assured Letty that he would look after her father and stepmother, so that she need be under no uneasiness on their account. In truth, he hardly allowed himself time for a cup of coffee before he drove off in search of Mr. Rivers. The farmer, after seeing the fire burn itself out, took refuge in the same cottage with his wife. From this he was coming forth, when he espied the apothecary in his chaise, and went forward to meet him. His step was as firm as

ever, his bearing as free ; and, though his eye lacked its wonted sparkle, no one would have believed, from his air, that he had just been brought by one blow to ruin.

"How are the two girls?" he cried, as he met the doctor.

"I fear both have bad colds," replied Mr. Mead, "and I am keeping them in bed, to-day. I think I ought to put you and Mrs. Rivers under the same treatment."

"I shall be glad if you will run in by-and-bye, and see my wife. As for myself, I hope I don't look like a sick man."

"You look a *man*."

"Of that I won't boast," said the farmer, humbly. "I am yet only at the beginning, and don't know how I may go through with it."

"There is only one way of going through bravely,—you must keep up the protoplasm. That is the source alike of bodily strength and mental. Feed, feed! Food replenishes our protoplasm, and replenished protoplasm provides the system with new cells, without

which we can neither be robust nor cheerful. Come home with me and you shall have a rumpsteak, which will give you as much protoplasm as you can take in at one meal."

"I have made my breakfast off bacon, thank you."

"And very likely taken in a horde of trichina, which instead of giving you protoplasm, will eat up what you have got. Not that there is no protoplasm in bacon—for it resides in everything, from the weed under our foot up to man himself. However, you won't eat beefsteak now, so let us go and look at the farm."

"I was just walking down there."

"Jump in the chaise, and we will go together."

Mr. Rivers took the seat at his side, and the chaise started off, quickly bringing them to the scene of the fire.

Melancholy sight it was. The house in which they had both spent such pleasant hours, and in which their children up to

last night met as sisters, now burnt out and gutted, presenting only broken and blackened walls. Behind rose the barns, in the same ruin, and encircling the spacious rick-yard, which yesterday contained the worth of a thousand pounds, but now was a smouldering litter. The engine was still pouring on water, and groups of people stood about, many of whom raised their hats to Mr. Rivers, and regarded him with pitying interest. As if to avoid this observation, Mr. Mead took his arm, and led him round by the meadow.

"You know my cottage and thirty acres at Cockington?" he said, when they reached the meadow, and came to a stand at the side of the rick-yard.

"You told me you had bought the place," answered Mr. Rivers; "but we have been in such a drive since then, I haven't been able to take a look at it. But I know John Reeve's thirty acres, and I hear your land is opposite."

"There is only the road between us. My

little villa there is ready for occupation. You know I intended to go and live in it myself, thinking Alice would soon be married, but I can't part with her till she gets up her strength, which will be a work of months ; so the villa wants a tenant. Now I beg you will take possession of it till you look round."

"I can't refuse such a kind offer, only I must make you promise to turn me out, if the Pastor carries Alice away sooner than you expect."

It may be observed here, that neither of the speakers knew the engagement was broken off.

"You shall have due notice. But I have to carry Alice away myself, first, and I intend to put her in charge of an old patient of mine, who keeps a boarding house at Torquay. I wish you would let Letty go with her."

"It is the very thing I could wish. Poor Letty has gone through so much, and this new sorrow will so shake her, that I shall

cast a weight from my mind when I feel she is out of it for a while."

"Yes, you will both be better for her absence; and by the time she comes back, you will have learnt to put a good face on the affair. It is a pity you ran out the insurance, but now you needn't insure as long as you live. Your risk of being burnt out a second time is only a millionth—practically none."

"From such risks as this I shall never be safe," answered Mr. Rivers, mournfully; "for last night's fire was no chance, as you imagine. I took such precautions about the rick-yard, it was next to impossible a spark could have come near it *accidentally*. I am thoroughly convinced the fire was an incendiary one."

"Surely not!" cried the apothecary, startled. "You are the last man to provoke incendiarism. Who could bear such a spite against you; a man everyone in Chesney respects?"

"I have been trying to remember anyone

I have affronted ; but incendiaries are not always incited by personal enmity, and sometimes act in sheer wantonness. Ah, there is John Reeve ! And ' isn't that Sergeant Appleby with him ? ”

Jack and the policeman were in close conference, but seeing the two friends, they now came forward.

“ Mr. Reeve has just found this, sir,” cried the policeman to Mr. Rivers ; and he produced a tin match-box.

Jack, garbed in cloth, and looking every inch a farmer, shook hands with both the gentlemen.

“ The box was close to the furthest rick-stand,” he said, “ and, you see, it's full of matches.”

“ What do you think now ? ” said Mr. Rivers to the apothecary.

“ I think our landowners should offer a reward to bring the villain to justice,” replied the apothecary, “ and I shall go and stir some of them up to it.” He added to Jack,

"I am coming round to see you in your new abode, John."

Jack seemed out of spirits, but he put on a smile. "Not to give me any more physic, doctor, eh? And I hope Miss Alley doesn't want any, unless it is some of the same sort."

The doctor understood this allusion to the succour he gave Jack in time of need; it was to lessen his sense of obligation about Alice.

"She wants no physic," he answered, "thanks to you—ever, ever thanks to you."

He waved his hand and drove off.

"Do you suspect anybody, sir?" the policeman asked of Mr. Rivers.

"No one."

"Have you any suspicions, Mr. Reeve?" demanded the constable.

"We'd better see first if we can find whether anybody was about the place," replied Jack.

In this opinion both Mr. Rivers and the policeman concurred, and they severally proceeded on the quest.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE INFORMER.

THE mission Mr. Mead imposed on himself proved a success, and, in consequence, posters appeared next morning in every direction, announcing the fact of the fire, and offering a hundred pounds to anyone giving information that should lead to the arrest and conviction of the incendiary.

One of these placards came to the hands of Mary Stair, who, after glancing it over, was mounting it in her shop, when she found herself interrupted by Bet Kedge. Since the affair of the letters, the postwoman had felt a secret antipathy to Bet, and now almost tripped up in her hurry to serve and get rid of her.

"Stumble in turnin', death by burnin'," cried Bet. "Thou'll need take care of fire, Mary Stair, though we must all come by death somehow."

"I hope you wish me no such ill, Mrs. Kedge," replied Mary, a little nettled by the augury, "for burnin's a cruel death. And yet I'd sooner burn in this world than the next, where the wicked 'll go into everlasting fire."

Mary raised her eyes sanctimoniously, without looking at Bet, whom, nevertheless, she intended this dismal view of the next world to hit. But the prospect produced no impression on Bet, who never thought of any world but the present.

"Bless us all, here's a fuss!" Bet exclaimed, leaning on her broomstick; "and all 'cause I just give 'ee a friend's warnin' against fire. And then 'ee bring up the everlastin' fire! What's that to I, any more than it be to thou?"

"I didn't say it were, Betsy," answered the postwoman, in a more politic tone; "and

as for fire, look at this. But you's heard it's all out about the farm."

Bet's eyes involuntarily winked.

"What's out? Ise heard nowt. And what do 'ee mean about that big paper?"

"Well, that's just it. Muster Rivers's ricks didn't set theirselves afire; nobody 'ud think they did, and they've found for certain that somebody put a light to 'em."

"How 'ull they prove that?" demanded Bet, with a horrible smirk.

"They's prove it fast enough, if they make out who dropped the match-box there; for you know them's picked one up."

"What d' yer say I know for?" returned Bet, savagely. "I tell't yer Ise heard nothin' about it."

"Well, don't take it so rough, Betsy. I daresay you aint heard, and yet you might know, you see. You're a Wise Woman, (the Lord bless us!) and you make things out without bein' told."

This compliment won Bet to smile.

"Not without bein' told," she muttered.

And reflecting that the information must come from a Satanic source, Mary Stair received this confession with a quake. "I has to rule the planets for it, and that's a great trouble. But yer aint said what's it all to do with that paper."

"Well, here's a reward offered for anyone who'll name the man as set light to the ricks. You see them big figures? That's what 'ull be paid—a hundred pound!"

"A hundred poun'!" exclaimed Bet. "And who'll pay it?"

"The gentry's clubbed it among 'em—so much apiece."

"Ay, ay! so Muster Rivers bairnt got it hisself. The pride o' that house be brought low, anyway. Now, suppose a body knowed the man, who 'ud they go to about it?"

"Does thou know him, Betsy?" cried the postwoman, with a half-frightened look.

"I said nowt about myself," retorted Bet, sharply. "Who's you to go to? that's all."

"Well, here it is," rejoined Mrs. Stair, running her finger along a line of the bill—
"*Apply to the Sergeant of Police, Chesney.*"

"Now, thee just give I a morsel o' 'bacco, Mary."

And Bet presented her tobacco-box, which Mrs. Stair, though with no good grace, returned to her replenished. Bet never gave thanks, but thrusting the box in her pocket, stamped sulkily out of the shop.

"Her's gettin' tired o' givin' a bit o' 'bacco, cuss her!" she muttered as she went along. "But her dussent leave it off. Ha! ha! Old Bet's too much for 'un. And Ise get the hundred poun', too! Muster Bradley, thou look out!"

Full of this intention, the old witch bent her steps towards Chesney, and there presented herself at the police-station. This was rather above the average of such structures, its chief drawbacks being a deficiency of light and air, and the proximity of a candle factory, which at times emitted odours a trifle too pungent for mortal noses. So potent, however, is use, that these things not only caused the police no inconvenience, but seemed to put them in flesh, as if the

factory supplied them with a perpetual inhalation of roast mutton.

The Sergeant was sitting in a big leather chair when saluted by Bet. In his classification of characters, Bet, as a Wise Woman, came under the designation of rogue and vagabond, the Sergeant not being a believer in Wise Women. But he was none the less friendly on that account.

"Well, mother, what's the matter with you?" he cried. "Any of your planets turned rusty, or are you going to bring a charge of mouse-murder against your cats? or what is it?"

"Thou'll never guess," answered Bet, entering into the joke, for she liked to be on good terms with the police.

"I don't know about that. You haven't come here for nothing, nor for a trifle, neither. But there is no use in my guessing when you're here to speak out. Now what is it?"

"Well, it's about the fire at Orchard Farm."

The Sergeant rose up, and shut the door.

"What do you know about it?" he demanded, magisterially.

"I was goin' down the meadow, and I see a man in front o' me. It were very dark-some, and when he stopped on a sudden, I was feared, and I stopped, too. Then, I see, he slant towards the rickyard."

"Don't hurry," said the Sergeant, coolly, as Bet paused. "Get it quite right."

"Thinks I, him's arter no good there," pursued Bet, without replying to the Sergeant's remark: "so I just follows he. And I hears a match go, then I see the light, and the man shove it in the rick. Thou may be sure I runned off then, quick as I could cut, and the man he runned, too."

"And did you know the man?"

"I keeps under the hedge, for I was feared o' my life, though I believe I'se live to be a hundred. But the rick blazed up like lightning, and I seed the man quite plain, and 'ull swear to 'un."

"Who was he?"

"Muster Bradley, Squire Granby's steward."

"Take care what you say," observed the sergeant, whose experience taught him not to be surprised to find crime in the most unlikely quarter, but who felt this statement required him to be guarded.

"What I says I'll stick to," answered Bet. "Muster Bradley was the man."

"You couldn't be mistaken?"

"Could I mistake thou, now Ise talkin' to 'ee? Mistake! I tell yer he comed up and spoke to me."

"You didn't mention that before."

"'Cause you didn't let I come to it, John Appleby."

"What did Bradley say?"

"It were summut about the farm blazin', and, afore Ise answer, he flies at my throat like a mad dog. But I skips back, and brings my stick swop on his fists, and then runs off."

The Sergeant took up a pen, and jotted down the heads of Bet's statement, when he

read it over to her. She admitted its correctness, and he requested her to affix her signature.

"Ise put my mark to it," said Bet.

"What! a Wise Woman, and not able to write!" cried the Sergeant, chaffingly.

"Ise never went to charity-school, like you, John Appleby," retorted Bet, as she made her sign manual.

"All the worse for you, old woman," replied the nettled Sergeant.

"Speak for yourself, though I don't deny"—for Bet here remembered the policy of being civil to the police—"yer a clever man, who's do credit to any school, or any bringin' up. And now just give me the hundred poun', please."

The Sergeant received this demand with a peal of laughter.

"You'll have to wait a bit for that, mother; and we've got to see yet whether you've any claim to it. There, be off now, and look after your cats and planets, and we'll see about the money by-and-bye."

And he hustled Bet out of the door.

Without troubling himself as to what could be Bradley's motive for his incendiaryism, the Sergeant did not doubt that Bet had made a true statement. But he knew that everybody else would deem it incredible ; and, therefore, he dared not arrest Bradley until he picked up some corroborative evidence. Not to leave the station empty, he was obliged to wait the appearance of one of his men, when, without breathing a word of the information received, he started in quest of this testimony.

His first destination was the shop of Mary Stair, who was sanding her sugar, under the counter—her custom always in the afternoon—when he appeared. And she rose up, as from a trapdoor.

"A nice morning after the rain, Mrs. Stair," said the Sergeant. "And how are you—and how's trade?"

"I be only dull, and trade's duller, Muster Appleby," replied the postwoman—"thank 'ee all the same."

"When isn't trade dull?" replied the chaffing Sergeant; "the shops are never satisfied—you'll allow that? You're like the farmers with the weather, Mrs. Stair. But, come, I'll give you a large order, which will set you up for a week—all but seven days. I want a box o' matches—non-smellers, if you've got 'em."

"I've got a lot of 'em, and very good they be—too good for this part, for I've only sold three boxes in a month. The folk here likes the halfpenny matches."

She handed a box to the Sergeant.

"They can't expect this for a halfpenny, nor a penny, neither," remarked the Sergeant. "There's too much tin here. Why ain't the non-smellers put in the same sort of box as the others? This will be about twopence, I suppose?"

"Ay, *toopence*," echoed Mary, in shop dialect.

The Sergeant put down the money.

"Now, who were your customers for the other three boxes?" he asked, carelessly.

"I only remember Muster Bradley, and I remember he 'cause he showed me a blotch on the box, which he said was the shape of a skull," replied Mary, "and that it warned we of death and judgment."

"Very good doctrine. There doesn't seem to be a skull on my box."

"No, I looked 'em all through, and none o' the others is marked in any way."

"I daresay you'd know Mr. Bradley's among a thousand, then?"

"Directly."

The Sergeant drew a box from his pocket.

"Is this it?"

Mary Stair turned pale. The production of a match-box by a policeman reminded her that one had been found in the rick-yard. But, looking at the box, she answered, without hesitation—

"There is the mark."

"You can swear to it?" said the Sergeant.

"I can swear I sold that box to Mr. Bradley."

"And you'll have to do it when the time comes," rejoined the Sergeant. "But better keep quiet till then."

He left the shop, and bent his steps to the Hall, deciding that it was due to Mr. Granby, as a great man and magistrate—or, if not due, that it was good policy, to tell him the case, before taking the grave step of arresting his steward. So he came to the gate, and, as a privileged person, was passing in, when a voice called to him from the lodge—

"Squire ain't at home, Muster Appleby."

"Where is he, Stokes? I want to see him on important business."

"About the fire, I'll lay," observed Stokes, presenting himself.

"That's it."

"Well, we don't know where he be. He went off the day before yesterday, and left word he'd be back to-night, and that's all anyone can tell you."

"I'll walk on to Mr. Bradley's. He'll know something."

"Mr. Bradley ain't here, neither, and hasn't been home for two nights. His housekeeper's just stepped down to ask about him, and is now inside."

The housekeeper, Mrs. Rogers by name, was actually *outside*, having been drawn forth, together with Mrs. Stokes, by the spell of this colloquy.

"I expect he be down at the fire, Muster Appleby," she cried, eager to join in. "He be very thick with Muster Rivers's family, you know, and—"

But the Sergeant saw that she knew nothing of Bradley's movements, and did not wait the completion of her speech, but, with a nod of adieu to Stokes, walked out of the gate.

He was on his road to the railway, to inquire if Bradley had gone off by the train, when, turning round the coppice, he met Mr. Mead, taking a stroll with his dog.

"Well, Appleby! any clue?" cried the doctor.

The Sergeant was not a man to precipi-

tate disclosures, as he considered a still tongue the basis of his profession; but, regarding Mr. Mead as a party concerned, he made no scruple of telling him his discoveries.

"This is very strange—astounding!" observed the doctor; "and we can only explain it by the law of necessity. You think he has absconded?"

"It looks like it, sir! Ah, that's a splendid retriever of yours, Doctor Mead. If I only had his nose, I'd soon unearth our bolter. He's found something in the coppice now, I expect, or he wouldn't bark that rate."

As he spoke, the dog came bounding up, in a panic; then faced round to the coppice, and resumed its barking.

"What, Dash, boy! what is it?" cried the doctor.

The dog plunged into the thicket, and the doctor followed, attended by the sergeant. A few steps among the trees brought them in sight of a body stretched

on the ground, and they darted forward together. It was Bradley, with his arms thrown above his head, his face distorted, and his tongue protruding—a stiffened and ghastly corpse.

The doctor bent down, and scrutinised the collapsing face.

“Murder or suicide, sir?” asked the sergeant.

“Apoplexy!” replied Mr. Mead. “I always thought he was weak here.” And the doctor touched his forehead.

“He was a P. B., sir,” rejoined the sergeant, in allusion to Bradley’s connexion with the Plymouth Brethren, intimating that weakness of the brain was the badge of all the tribe.

“And *what is he now?*” murmured the doctor, meditatively.

CHAPTER XIV.

JACK AND ALICE.

THE sergeant went for a stretcher to remove the corpse to the "Granby Arms," there to await the inquest, and Mr. Mead continued his stroll to the farm, where Mr. Rivers, though he had taken possession of the villa at Cockington, was still looking after the wreck of his property.

The news of Bradley's death deeply grieved Mr. Rivers, nor was his sorrow lessened by hearing that facts pointed at the steward as the incendiary. Ignorant of Bradley's feelings towards himself, he could imagine no motive for his conduct, and, therefore, set it down to insanity. The apothecary took the same view, and

they talked it over in this spirit, agreeing that death came to the unhappy man as a release.

"I must go home, and try to be the first to tell Mrs. Rivers," said the farmer, "or the blow may smite her too heavily."

"I take the girls over to Torquay to-morrow," replied Mr. Mead, "and we shall look in on our way, to say good-bye."

"Thank you for all your forethought," answered Mr. Rivers, moving off.

The doctor's way lay in the other direction, and he walked leisurely, unconscious that a visitor awaited him at home. Certainly it would have quickened his pace to know he was to meet Jack Reeve. He had been twice to Jack's farm without securing that object, and Jack now thought it manners to make his appearance at the 'spensary.

Very dejected Jack was. Nevertheless, he put on his best suit, and tried to wear his best looks, and neither looks nor suit admitted much room for fault-finding. He

had fallen into his new grade as if he had been to the manner born. His ancient lineage gave him a stamp which now won recognition even from county magnates, and some very polite people addressed letters to him by the title of "Esquire." His little property took magnitude from the fact of its being his own freehold, so he everywhere met a welcome.

The doctor's servant invited Jack in, declaring her master was expected every instant, and Jack followed her into the little drawing-room, where, before he could draw breath, he found himself in presence of Alice.

Alice seemed to share his surprise, for her face flushed crimson, but then she sprang from her chair and clasped his hand.

"I was just thinking of you," she said; "thinking that only for you I should now be dead—and such a death! What am I to say to you? Tell me what to say, John Reeve."

"Nothing," answered Jack, with unsteady voice; "for if you hadn't come to me *that*

time, I shouldn't have lived to do it, so it's just tit for tat, Miss Alley, and we'll never have a word more about it."

"Very well," replied Alice, though the subject, in the feelings it inspired, still beamed in her face. "Now tell me about your farm. We haven't seen you since you went there, and I want to hear how you like it."

"It's a very good piece of ground. I don't know that I like it overmuch, but a neighbour's offered to rent it of me."

"What a pity to let him have it, when you are such a good farmer. And you always showed such a fancy for farming."

"Fancies alter," answered Jack, miserably.

Alice clouded.

"Perhaps you think of going away from this part?" she said.

"It has been running in my head ever since I got the land."

"I am sure everybody will be sorry if you

do go, and I don't know any one who would be more missed."

"Ah! it isn't the men who're missed. They are here to-day and gone to-morrow, and after a week or so, nobody says a word about them, unless they happen to be a doctor, like Mr. Mead, or vicar of the parish. Then they'll be brought up sometimes, when people are talking. It's the lasses who're kept in mind. There's old folk here who'll tell you now about pretty Maggie Lardner, who has been buried fifty years. A pretty lass, who's loved all over the place, leaves a mark, like the pixies, when they come down from Dartmoor, and dance on the grass. You may have the grass cut every year, and their ring 'ull still come up, and you'll never get it out."

"You talk about the pixies as if they were real."

"The sort I speak of are real enough."

"The Maggie Lardner sort, I suppose?"

"And better than Maggie, too!" said Jack.

"Then you may well call them pixies, for I think they will be as hard to find," observed Alice, smiling, but with a touch of bitterness.

"I don't doubt it," observed Jack, with a drooping air. "If they don't come in your way, it's no use lookin' for them. I'm well up to that, Miss Alley."

"Anyhow, I hope you won't go away without talking to papa and Mr. Rivers about it. I want you to promise me that."

"They're sure to hear of it," answered Jack, with a faint smile.

"That is a put off," cried Alice, reddening. "I do believe you intend to slip away without telling us. And now you are as far off as Cockington, we shall see nothing of you."

"You'll see me pretty often, as long as you're within ten miles."

"What do you call pretty often?"

"May be three times a week," suggested Jack, timidly.

"There are seven days in the week," remarked Alice, with a thoughtful look.

"That's true."

"And to-morrow I am going for three weeks to Torquay: that is twenty-one days. And you promise not to go while I am away?"

"*While you're away!* Yes, I promise that, Miss Alley!"

At this point, they were interrupted by Mr. Mead, who entered by the French window from the garden.

"Ah, John Reeve! I have caught you at last." And they shook hands. "And now you get on your hat, Alley, and take a walk with Letty. I found her moping in the summer house, and we must keep her stirring. John will excuse you."

"You will be here when we come back?" Alice said to Jack.

"I promised to be with Mr. Rivers in half-an-hour," answered Jack, apologetically.

"I mustn't ask you to break *promises*," rejoined Alice, significantly, "so I shall bid

you good-bye, as I daresay we shan't see you again till I come back from Torquay."

She gave him her hand, and Jack turned very pale, feeling that he held it for the last time. In a moment she was gone, and he sank back in his chair.

He knew her father was talking to him, for he sat opposite, and saw his lips in motion, and presently his ear caught a word or two, revealing that the apothecary was speaking of the fire, and his rescue of Alice. And then they shook hands, and Jack, beginning to collect himself, thought this was the signal for him to go, and rose up accordingly.

"Stay a minute, Jack," observed the doctor. "There's a little matter I wish to speak to you about. You know Alice is soon to be married!"

Jack faltered out assent.

"And I think of giving up practice and taking to live in the little villa at Cockington, so we shall be close neighbours. Now I know nothing about farming, but I like

to look on ; and I want you to take my few acres into your farm, where I shall be sure they are well looked after. I won't let you pay any rent for them, but we will make an agreement, that I am to have them back when you have turned me into a farmer."

"Thank you, doctor, thank you, with all my heart. I know what you mean. But I'll tell you the real truth: I am going to London to-morrow, to see about setting up in another country, and I believe it 'ull be Canada."

"Never, Jack! With my land and your own, you will have sixty acres—worth six hundred in Canada! And here you are in your own country, and your own county, where your forefathers have lived time out of mind. At least, think of all this."

"Ay, doctor, I'll think of it."

"And when will you let me know?"

"Before you go out to-morrow."

The conversation depressed the doctor, who, as soon as Jack departed, fell into sad thoughts. He had reached that time of

life when we cling to familiar faces, and, one by one, these were dropping away. It is an experience we must all meet—if we live long enough; the dragon tribute exacted by advancing years, rending the fast bonds of friendship, and the dearest ties of kin. The apothecary, just as he thought to retire, and take his ease, was to be parted in one moment from the Riverses, Jack, and his own and only child! Where, at his age, could he find new companionship, and new sources of sympathy? And, even if found, could they supply the place of the old?

His reverie was disturbed by a footstep, and, looking round, he perceived Alice, who had noiselessly returned to the room. She came forward and kissed his forehead.

“I have something to tell you, papa,” she said.

Her tremulous tone brought the doctor’s eyes to her face, and in its thinned cheek, hectic flush, and dejected look, he saw new ground for sadness.

“I am not to be separated from you,

dear," she continued, dropping her gaze. "Isaac Wingfield and I have agreed to break off. He has released me."

"Was this at your own request?" asked the apothecary, after a pause of surprise.

"Yes."

"Isaac Wingfield is a worthy man: a man of character, talent, and property—every way a good match. What was your reason for breaking off, Alley?"

"I felt we shouldn't be happy together," faltered Alice.

"You couldn't have entertained such a doubt when you accepted him!"

"The doubt was in my mind, and I let him see it was, as he kindly owns."

"You think you have behaved to him honestly and becomingly?"

"If there has been any failure, it was in receiving his attentions, not in declining to be his wife."

"When you broke off, you didn't do it that you might be free to marry somebody you liked better?"

"*When I broke off*, I had no such thought," answered Alice, with tears.

"I don't mean to wound you, my girl," said her father, twining his arm round her; "I only wish you to be sure about your own motive."

"My motive was that I did not, could not love him, papa. And the design in my mind was never to marry, and never to part from you."

"I don't want to part!" cried the doctor, drawing her to his breast.

CHAPTER XV.

JACK'S RESOLUTION.

NEXT morning brought Jack with halting step, to tell the apothecary his decision. A sleepless night gave him a worn look, but his compressed lips and intent eye indicated a resolve not to be shaken by unrest, nor overcome by trial. Through much wavering, through long hours of self-scrutiny, through bitterness and despondency, this conclusion had been reached, and it was now rooted in his breast.

The apothecary received him in his consulting room.

"Here we can't be interrupted," he said, making Jack sit down, "and we will have it out together."

"In five minutes, doctor," answered Jack, "for I know I am keeping you, and I shall lose the train myself if I stop longer. Yes, I've only come to thank you with all my heart, and say good-bye with all my heart, too."

"You mustn't leave us, Jack. Take longer time for it. Don't—for all our sakes—don't make this great move without consideration."

"I've considered about it too much, doctor," answered Jack, mournfully; "I've now to do it. I don't want to be like the Brent folk, who kept on considering how they'd build a church on top of the Tor. At last one night they went to bed, and when they got up in the morning, they found the church built. You see it there now, and they tell you Satan built it in a night. And if I don't try to get to the top of my Tor, maybe Satan 'ull give me a lift."

"So you have got a Tor! Well, perhaps I can give you a lift, without your waiting for Satan, who wouldn't be satisfied to lift

you to the top, but would pitch you over the other side. Tell me all about it."

"As I am going away, I will, though you can't help me, but you'll see I don't act in stubbornness. You'll say it's worse—foolishness. For it all comes of my loving a lass."

"Nothing foolish in that," said the doctor. "But if you love her, why don't you get married?"

Jack could not answer.

"Dead!" cried the doctor, sympathizingly.

"No, no!"

"What then?"

"She is to be married to somebody else."

"Jilted you!" exclaimed the apothecary, starting up.

"Never! She doesn't even know about it. I couldn't tell her, for you see she's a bit above me—I mean in state of life, doctor, for in herself she's above everybody, so good, so handsome! Now you know how it is. If I stop in this country, where everything keeps her in my mind, I'll never be a man

again. So good-bye, doctor! I'll write from London. When I get there I can settle all my plans."

"But there's one thing you have left out—the lass's name, Jack."

"Ah! you won't like to hear it. Never mind the name."

"Do you bid me good-bye in this way—mistrusting me?"

Jack looked bewildered; then, with voice dropped to a whisper, he said, "*It's our Miss Alley!*"

Then he turned to the door.

"I'll walk a bit of the way with you," cried the doctor, catching up his hat.

And they left the house together.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE VISIT TO COCKINGTON.

ALL these events produced a deep impression on Letty. It seemed to her that they arose one way or another in relation to herself—that she was the innocent and involuntary cause of Bradley's crime, of her father's eviction from the farm, and of the family ruin. Everything could be traced to her fatal association with Ralph—Ralph, who had entrapped her by his vows, and then abandoned and divorced her.

This conclusion plunged her in despondency. It seemed a penalty for her trespass, which she now saw in a light so exaggerated, and made so fruitful of regrets. In the dead hours of night, she tossed on her pillow,

under this tempest of emotion, as on raging waves, and almost welcomed, like Lear, the distraction of the storm. But gradually her heart awoke to softer instincts. She pined to go home, to cheer her father and step-mother, and take her share in their cares. Nothing but the decided opposition of Alice kept her back, and Alice brought her to see that her absence must relieve her father, to whom it gave the assurance, in the midst of his own harass, that she was benefiting by change of air and scene. Letty reflected that she indeed needed this restorative, and the thought that she might return home strengthened, reconciled her to the delay. So she agreed to accompany Alice to Tor-quay.

At the appointed hour they were joined by the apothecary, who made no allusion to his walk with Jack, and they found the chaise at the door, loaded with their two portmanteaus. The doctor took Letty in the front seat by his side, but she needed only to turn her head to chat with Alice,

and she was in full exercise of this power when the chaise drove off.

The road lay across country, up hill and down, and through narrow lanes, where the high green banks, perfect walls of sward, often left little to be seen in the way of prospect. But the lanes were themselves pretty, the banks being inlaid with posies of violet, and whole beds of primrose, and clusters of polyanthus, while the turf rose up to the hedge, lending a foil to the emerald foliage of spring. And in places, the hills opened in a basin, beautifully dotted with wood, or rose in long slopes, so that field and meadow, belted with trees, or merging in low coppice, looked over the road like hanging gardens. The day was not sunny, but neither was it overcast; a Torquay day in its most April aspect. But this did not cloud the cheerful drive, and the ear responded to the pleasant jingle of the horse's bells, which, resounding along the way, warned coming teams to draw on one side at points where the road took breadth, and so allow the chaise to pass.

The girls occasionally resumed their chat, but without drawing a word from Mr. Mead, who had fallen into a philosophic abstraction. Well aware that he was only an aggregation of air-cells, developed from a granule, and, therefore, that what happened in the world could really be of no consequence to him, he was trying to make out why he did not feel this indifference. In the regular course of pan-Genesis, the air-cells he derived from his father ought to give him his father's nature, making him hard, grasping and dropsical, whereas his tendencies took a directly opposite turn, so that he was born as much out of the legitimate groove as a man with a tail. The only way he saw out of this difficulty was to give it up. Some day or other, some clever fellow would hit on a theory explaining it all. He would now content himself with seeking an aside with Mrs. Rivers, during their visit, and taking her opinion on his family affairs.

A surprise awaited them at Cockington,

and afforded the doctor an opening. They were met at the villa-gate by Harry Clayton, who told the doctor he was staying at Torquay, to paint a coast piece for the Exhibition, when, hearing of the fire at the farm, he rode over to inquire about his friends. Mrs. Rivers stood at the door, while he helped the girls to alight, and Letty hurried up to her, thus avoiding entanglement with Harry. Mrs. Rivers held out her hand, but Letty saluted her with a kiss, and they walked into the parlour together.

"What a pretty room!" exclaimed Letty, glancing round, as she sat down.

"And such a pleasant look-out," cried Harry, determined Letty should make it up with him. "There is something Swiss in that clustering wood, and the lines of the hills."

"If you want a picture," said Mr. Mead, seizing his opportunity, "take the girls round that corner, and pass through the lodge to Cockington Church, and I will wait till you come back."

"I want to stay with papa," answered Letty. And, rising from her chair, she added to Mrs. Rivers, "Is he upstairs, or in the garden?"

"He went off to the farm, directly after breakfast," replied Mrs. Rivers, "but said he would be back in time to see you, and I was to ask the doctor to stay for him if he happened to be late. So you can walk round to the church if you like."

"Let us go, Letty," pleaded Alice. "I have heard so much about Cockington Church, I have quite a wish to see it."

Letty thought she could no longer refuse, without appearing unthoughtful for Alice; so she rose up, and they went off under Harry's escort.

As they walked along, Alice spoke in an undertone to Letty.

"Look on the other side of the road," she said; "that must be John Reeve's land, 'the thirty acres.'"

"Ah, it is just opposite your papa's!" answered Letty; "and there is the house,

peeping over the trees. Let us go and see it."

Alice blushed and hesitated.

"Not to-day," she then said.

While they were talking, Harry asked a man the way to the lodge mentioned by the apothecary, and a short walk brought them to the spot. The lodge, a rustic structure, opened the avenue of a park, diverting their attention from a passing horseman, who, as he rode by, saw them enter. It was Mr. Granby, looking very chinfallen—indeed, with his chin at the lowest elevation—for *him*. The sight of Letty caused him to start, and he all but drew up, but changed his mind, and rode on. He was coming in quest of Mr. Rivers, and presently stopped at the villa, where the farmer and his wife had found a temporary home.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN COCKINGTON CHURCH.

The manor of Cockington was a gift from William the Conqueror to Sir William de Cockington, who fought by his side at Hastings, and it formed the marriage dower of Sir William's last descendant, Alice de Cockington, who, in the reign of Richard the Third, gave her hand to Sir Ralph de Woodlands. The sole offspring of this union was a daughter, another Alice, whose marriage with Sir John Cary, Chief Baron of the Exchequer, in the reign of Henry the Seventh, transferred Cockington to the Carys of Stantor. Here lived George Cary, who rode from London to Edinburgh to announce the death of Queen Elizabeth to

James the First, almost without drawing rein ; and the groves of Cockington were a haunt of that ideal patriot, Lucius Cary, Lord Falkland. Another marriage put the Carys in possession of Tor Abbey, and Cockington passed to the family of Mallock, in a female branch of which, calling itself by the old name, the manor is still vested.

In the avenue, Harry manœuvred to get by the side of Letty, but his success was only momentary ; for Letty stopped to look round, and Harry, on going forward, found himself next to Alice. Presently they sighted the mansion, a fine Tudoresque pile, of white stone, shaded, but not dimmed, by its sheaf of centuries. It stood in the lap of a dell, flanked and backed by luxuriant wood, while the park spread a carpet of sward in front, till the dell, rising in gentle slopes of green, merged at its brink in a grove. On the left rose the church, approached by a winding path through a screen of trees, and from this sylvan surrounding the old fabric borrowed a pic-

turesqueness to which it contributed itself nothing but the hoar of age.

As they walked round to the door, they were met by a man who had been making some arrangement in the Church, and who offered to return to show them the secret recess in the belfry.

"You know the history of it, sir, I expect," he said to Harry, "and how one of the old Mallocks were stowed away there, in King Charles's time."

Harry had not heard the tradition: nor was it known to the two girls.

"Was he a Cavalier or a Roundhead?" Harry asked.

"I don't rightly know—except that he were for the King," replied the man, "and he fought in battle for him. Then he had to hide for his life, and they brought him food at night, though he knew how to provide hisself, for the story goes he used to steal out in the dark, and have good sport in the woods."

They all entered the church, which pro-

bably had undergone no change since it gave a refuge to the proscribed cavalier; for the open nave spoke of a time when the poor were expected to go through the service standing, while the better class sat in pews in the aisle, which was not only three steps higher, but was further cut off from the commonalty by a screen. This was now mouldering away, and had apparently been unvisited by paint since the days of Philip and Mary.

The place of concealment proved to be one of those recesses of which there are many examples in our old castles and mansions, and which, in our present state of civilisation, we could not believe to have ever served the purpose, if the testimony were not irresistible. Letty took but a glance at the cavity, and then slipped away to survey the church, leaving Alice and Harry in the belfry.

The antique quaintness of the edifice struck a sympathetic chord in her mind. What generations of simple rustics had met

under its roof—come there in sorrow, and come in joy! And where were they now? Strange that, as she sat down in one of the pews, her mind's eye should people the space in front with these tillers of the soil, and conjure up none of its lords—the cavaliers, and courtiers, and barons, and mailed knights, all as erased as the peasants. But her thoughts led her to remember a higher power, to whom lords and labourers were alike; and recognising the sanctity of the spot, she bent for a moment in prayer.

As she looked up, her eye lighted on Harry, standing by the pew door. Harry caught sight of her at the same instant, and she, with the impress of worship on her face, rose to his imagination as the impersonation of one of Raffaele's Madonnas. Often had she flashed on his thoughts since they parted in the road, when she dismissed him in all but anger. Though so mortified at the time, he gradually came to admire her conduct on that occasion, perceiving that it blended sensibility with discretion. True,

it left him more open to note a predilection evinced for him by Lisabee Hargrave, and the advantages he would derive from such a connexion in pursuing the objects of his ambition. But his preference for Letty revived directly he arrived in the neighbourhood of her home. Her appearance on the scene gave it new force, and now her pure loveliness, realising his inspirations of the ideal, fanned the spark into flame. Nevertheless he kept a curb on his lips, resolving to make sure of his ground before he declared himself.

"This church strikes such a chill upon you," he said, as he turned to Letty, "I could fancy myself in the crypt of an Italian cathedral, only there is too much light."

"We must allow this is a proper place for light," answered Letty, distantly, as she stepped down into the nave.

"Very proper; but light destroys my illusion."

"The light here *ought* to destroy illusions."

"That may be very sound doctrine, but it won't answer in practice. Without illusions we should all die of the doldrums, and why should they be taken from us by religion, which professes to aim at making us happy?"

"Only a few would suffer."

"The suffering would be universal, for there isn't a living person without an illusion. The plain woman believes she is a beauty, the virago fancies she is a model of good temper, and the disappointed man thinks he deserved to succeed. To all these their illusion is a consolation. On the other hand, many find an illusion a source of enthusiasm—a quality which has done more to benefit mankind than any other. Look at barristers! They all have the illusion they will die Lord Chancellor, and one in ten thousand does. And, of course, all artists dream of becoming president of the Academy."

"In your case, that may not be an illusion, for we may hope it will come to pass."

Harry's cheek flushed; unknowingly she had touched the deepest spring in his breast.

"You feel this interest in me?" he said, gratefully.

"Not as an illusion, mind!" answered Letty, with a faint smile, "but prophetically." The smile disappeared as she added, "I have done with illusions."

"Come, I shall be prophetic too," cried Harry, "and declare you will take to them again—indeed, won't be able to live without them."

"That is saying I can't bear the real."

"I know you *can* bear it; may I not dare to say you have already borne it?" and Harry spoke in tones of sympathy. "But too much reality is like a glare—too much light; and such a poetic nature as yours must have illusions, which give a little shade—darkness if you will—but the agreeable darkness of dreams."

Here Alice came up.

"What are you two talking about?" she asked, rallying.

"Light and darkness," returned Harry.

"And which do you think best?"

"Darkness, of course."

Alice replied in a low tone: "Then, look at the church door."

Letty followed her glance, and was startled to perceive Mr. Granby.

The Squire had scanned them all before he was seen, and had time to discard the scowl brought to his face by the sight of Harry. To their common surprise he now bowed to Letty, but took no notice of either Harry or Alice.

Letty was just averting her head when she received this recognition. She turned pale, then a little blush flew to her cheek, and her eyes seemed to dilate. Harry and Alice moved on, but for the moment she had no power to follow, and was rooted to the spot. This afforded Mr. Granby an opportunity of stepping up to her.

"I feel I am addressing you at great disadvantage," he said, grandly, but softening his air as he proceeded. "I came to Cock-

ington to see your father, and am disappointed to find him away from home; and since I have had the good fortune to meet you, I hope you will permit me to say to yourself how much I am shocked at these sad events,—all the work, it appears, of that mad Bradley,—I shall be very happy if I can do anything to alleviate the calamity.”

This speech Letty acknowledged by an inclination of her head, saying nothing.

“It is, above all, my wish that Mr. Rivers should retain possession of Orchard Farm,” continued Mr. Granby. “As I have missed him myself, may I ask you to tell him this?”

“I can have no objection to do so,” answered Letty, coldly, “but he will probably consider that such an arrangement can only be made between you and himself.”

Her distant manner—it even approached to haughtiness—disconcerted Mr. Granby, from the first ill at ease.

“Pardon me if I have seemed to trouble

you with a business matter," he said. "I shall, of course, make a point of seeing Mr. Rivers myself, but I thought he might be entering into some other undertaking, if I delayed letting him know about the farm; and, as all this happened through my steward, I consider he has a claim on my—"

Mr. Granby intended to say *protection*, but suddenly pulled up, and blurted out "*my friendship*."

As he spoke, he glanced up at Letty: there was again the same little blush in the centre of her cheek.

"I shall deliver your message, sir," she replied.

Mr. Granby looked as if he wished to say more, but he changed his mind, and, making a low bow—it was very low, allowed Letty to depart.

Harry and Alice were just outside the door.

"Isn't it incredible that our friend should be talking to that man, who has brought her

family and herself to the verge of destruction?" said Harry, in a rage.

Alice was almost as excited.

"How he can dare to speak to her is astonishing," she said. "What she must feel, poor thing!"

"Why did she stand still, and give him the opportunity?"

"She was so agitated by his appearance," answered Alice; "I saw she hadn't power to move. And how could she think he would go up to her?"

"I almost feel warranted in turning back, and bringing her away from him," said Harry, hesitatingly.

"You mustn't do that."

Harry coloured. "No," he observed, bitterly, "a woman always turns to the hand that strikes her. The navy had a very good excuse for beating his wife—*it amuses her, and doesn't hurt me.*"

"What a shameful wretch!"

"The navy or Mr. Granby?"

"Hush," said Alice, "here is Letty. We

had better take no notice about her staying behind."

This counsel so impressed Harry that when Letty came up, he had not a word to say. But silence was not his forte, and he presently fell into a gush of talk, in which he laid himself out to amuse Letty. But Letty made no response, and he noted a change in her air, which he knew not whether to call sad or abstracted.

On reaching the villa, they found both Mrs. Rivers and the apothecary much graver than when they went out. Mrs. Rivers spoke to Letty apart.

"Mr. Granby has been here," she said. "I did not see him, as he only stopped at the door to ask for your father, but he left word he should call again."

"You will be surprised to hear he has been speaking to me," answered Letty.

Mrs. Rivers was indeed surprised. "What did he say?" she inquired, eagerly.

Letty related what passed.

"It may be his heart has been turned to

do some good," she said, in a devout tone. She added, thoughtfully, "But we don't know how your father will take this. And he has sent to say he is detained at the farm, so you won't see him to-day."

"I am sorry for that. But we know he will do what is right—right to you as well as to me."

"Yes."

They felt they could say no more, and, indeed, Letty was now called by the doctor, who became impatient to depart. Harry contrived to secure the office of helping Letty into the chaise, but with this he had to content himself, as his road lay in the opposite direction. Letty's face had again changed, and, as she sank back in the seat, became lit up with a smile.

"Pleasant thoughts!" exclaimed Harry, though the smile seemed dubious.

Letty half sighed, "What if they are illusions?"

As she spoke, the horse plunged forward and bore her off.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HARRY'S LAWSUIT.

HARRY rode away in low spirits. He found Letty more fascinating than ever, while her reception of himself had been chilling, when he expected her to be impressed by his professional success, which obtained for him such attentions in society. He believed, indeed, he had been winning upon her up to the time when they were invaded by Mr. Granby. From that moment Letty retired within herself, surrounding herself with some abstraction, he could not divine what. Had Mr. Granby been holding out an olive branch? or had he simply spoken to her of the catastrophe at the farm? Impossible that he should make her any overture! No,

it was not Mr. Granby he should suspect; it was Letty herself! She might see an opening for her woman-adroitness—for striking in for a re-marriage. Certainly something was in her mind, or whence all these signs? the sudden abstraction, that dubious smile, and her own account of her thoughts—“*what if they are illusions!*” The enigma defied scrutiny.

Harry's engagements required him to go next day to London, and he reconciled himself to the necessity by reflecting that Letty would also be absent from home, and, consequently out of the way of the Granbys. He determined to return as soon as possible, while he should take advantage of his stay in town to push on his claim to the Hall, which Mr. Simmer seemed to be allowing to sleep. In fact, the lawyer had very much cooled in the affair, and left his last letters of inquiry unanswered. More than this: Henry went for an explanation to the office, and was denied an interview. But he formed a resolution to put up with no fur-

ther postponements, and no more evasion, and if Mr. Simmer declined to take decided steps, he would instantly place his cause in other hands.

To such ardour the atmosphere of a lawyer's office is very discouraging. There the row of busy clerks, the files of papers, the fireproof boxes, all the objects around, suggest obstruction, and we are painfully admonished of the law's delays. Mr. Simmer's chambers now struck this chill upon Harry, bringing him into a suitable frame of mind, and he had become perfectly docile when, almost to his surprise, he was admitted to the lawyer's presence.

"Well," cried Mr. Simmer, rubbing his hands, after shaking Harry's, "how are things going down in Devon?"

"You know I have been there, then?" replied Harry.

"I heard it from somebody—either Hargrave or Mrs. Dorrington. You have been taking peeps at the Hall, I suppose! Mind the Squire doesn't have you up for poaching."

"I want you to have *him* up," answered Harry, with as pleasant a look as he could assume. "Don't you think it is time to make some definite move?"

"What do you call a definite move? I suppose taking forcible possession of his house was definite enough, and we didn't make much of that. Rely upon it, the only move that will have any effect is a legal one, and this must hinge on a clear proof of right. Now, I daresay you have an idea that nothing has been done in the cause?"

"No doubt you have commenced proceedings, but—"

"Stop, my friend! What do you think of my having expended three hundred pounds in the business?"

"Is it possible?"

"Out of my own pocket," resumed Mr. Simmer, rising to effervescence. "And all this is preliminary—money paid for searches in registers, genealogies, and certificates, and for travelling expenses, and other charges. And still I haven't made your case clear."

"I thought you were satisfied that my claim was as good as the present possessor's?"

"Yes, but I have to ascertain more than that, and searches bring to light things we don't look for, and never dream of. At present we are in a hitch; that is all I can tell you. Now"—here Mr. Simmer rose, intimating that his time was up—"will you allow me to go on as I can?"

"Unquestionably."

And Harry departed a little wiser, but a sadder man.

CHAPTER XIX.

HARRY RECEIVES VISITORS IN HIS STUDIO.

HARRY found it necessary, in his improved position as an artist, to hire a studio, and, as his connexion required it to be in the costly region of the West, he thought himself fortunate in securing a deserted school-room, in a May Fair alley. Years of need had taught him thrift, and he knew how to make things look their best at small outlay; so, by degrees, he converted this den into a cheerful saloon. Of course nobody supposed that it was anything more than a studio, and lady-visitors would have been shocked to learn that the two smart ottomans, which afforded them such comfortable seats, were Harry's cupboards—one containing a grid-iron, a frying-pan, a kettle, and a saucepan;

and the other being stored with bread and butter, tea, sugar, cold meat, and bottled beer. At night the couch was denuded of its pretty chintz cover, and turned into a bed, and Harry rolled up the square of Axminster carpet, and made it do duty as a toilet-table.

The day following Harry's return to town, brought to the studio two visitors — Mr. Hargrave and Lisabee. The popular member had hinted to Harry that he would be doing a graceful thing to paint his portrait for the Exhibition, and Harry so promptly responded, that the work was now nearly completed. Hence it began to be representative, and, while Mr. Hargrave resigned himself to a sitting, Lisabee went into raptures at the likeness.

"It is so striking," she exclaimed, "I could say of it what Michael Angelo said of the horse at Rome, *it trots* — only papa doesn't trot!"

"I should think not," cried Mr. Hargrave. "Trotting might do very well in Michael

Angelo's day, but now you must go ahead. And I believe I can do it, eh, Clayton?"

Harry laughed, answering—"You don't let the grass grow under your feet."

"I should deserve to be put out to grass if I did, when the whole world is in motion. What said Galileo in his dungeon, '*still it moves!*' and it has been going at high pressure ever since. You can't put the drag on an avalanche; it dashes on, and takes a header."

"Yet I can't get up funds for a plunging bath!" sighed Lisabee.

She took possession of one of the ottomans, unconsciously sinking down on Harry's frying-pan, while her father submitted himself for portrayal. The sitting lasted an hour, when Mr. Hargrave said he must call on a Cabinet Minister living a few doors from the alley, and would return for Lisabee, who, caring not to visit Cabinet Ministers, agreed to wait.

"Now pray go on painting," she said to Harry, as soon as they were alone—for a

small boy, who acted as Harry's page, purveyor, courier, and slave in general, kept by the door, and, being out of earshot, was as good as nobody — indeed better. "I wouldn't for the world interrupt your labours."

"Did you ever hear of labours lost?" asked Harry.

"Only Love's Labour Lost."

"Only?"

"Well, I suppose there is nothing in that to make a wonder of?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Then why did you make one?"

"I only said *only*."

"And that says a volume," laughed Lisabee.

"A volume of fact, or a volume of fiction?"

"A volume of smoke," answered Lisabee, "for it sets me in the clouds."

"Come down to *terra firma*, like the good fairy in the pantomime, and clear all up. It would be a capital transformation scene—

you stepping out of a cloud, and turning everything into gold with the wand of the Useful Improvement Fund."

"But the fund isn't to do that, and I believe it would obtain more support if people understood the real object. None of it is expended on luxuries; we don't even study the ornamental—all is the useful."

"And what can be more useful than gold?"

"Ah! for what it will buy, but in itself it is dross."

"Very pretty dross, though, and can be made, among other things, into splendid bracelets."

"And it will buy something better than bracelets—splendid pictures."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Harry; "you have me there. Yes, gold will buy pictures. And what will it not buy?"

"One thing at least," said Lisabee, simperingly.

"Proclaim it with sound of trumpet."

"It is a trumpet itself—fame."

“And you think fame can’t be purchased with gold? Why, you can buy it for yourself with your Useful Improvement Fund. Such things have obtained worship for some of the greatest snobs in England. From this time keep their example in your eye. Be useful to Brassboro’, but make Brassboro’ useful to you; stamp your own name on all you do—whether for church, wash-house, market, or plunging-bath, and you’ll never find, what we began by talking about, love’s labour’s lost.”

“But then it won’t be love’s labour at all. And, besides, how does that apply to your labour being lost, as you hinted?”

“My application wasn’t to the Fund, but to yourself. How could I go on with my work when you were by? I should be painting bits of you in your papa’s portrait, and so my labour would be lost, since the picture would be neither yourself nor your papa. And then I have a very good likeness of you.”

“Really!” cried Lisabee, with gratified

blush. "And you have never shown it to me?"

"That is out of my power."

"Why so?"

"Because it is locked up here," answered Harry, touching his breast.

Harry made this speech in a playful way, so that it might pass for mere gallantry, but he contrived to throw into his air just that touch which in an excited mind raised a doubt whether it might not be in earnest. That this view struck Lisabee was too evident, and Harry felt grateful to the gods that they were here joined by Mr. Hargrave. He was pursuing, with a little variation, the same tactics with Lisabee that he had once thought to practise on Letty. The variation was, that he wished to hold her in reserve, so as to have two strings to his bow. Letty possessed his heart—or it might be more correct to say his imagination, and he intended to win her if he could. But failure should not leave him without a destiny, as he could fall back on Lisabee.

CHAPTER XX.

MRS. DORRINGTON TAKES HER GREAT STEP.

THE interview with Letty did not inspirit Mr. Granby. His mind was oppressed by a weight which he could not shake off, and all the way home he wore the same cloud on his face. Could it be caused by the shock of the fire and Bradley's guilt and death, entailing such ruin on the family at the farm, and bringing him to think he was in some way responsible for these results. He was not one to be very sensitive, but such events might produce a reaction, even in a blunted nature, and prompt a wish to make the Riverses some reparation. But whatever his motive, he failed in his object, for the next day brought him a letter from

Mr. Rivers, acknowledging his message by Letty, but declining the farm, which, he said, being of large size, required more capital than he now possessed, while one suited to his present means had, without his seeking it, been that morning let to him by Sir Charles Raven, a neighbouring landlord.

This letter greatly discouraged Mr. Granby, and he passed the day very moodily, neglecting his usual pursuits. At night he formed a resolution to go to London in search of Ralph; and it has been shown how he met Ralph in the House of Lords. Next day he was awaiting Ralph's visit, according to their arrangement, when his servant, with some trepidation, asked if he should introduce a lady who had arrived in a carriage, but who declined to give her name.

When the name is unknown, a carriage is a better credential than a card, and Mr. Granby ordered the visitor to be admitted.

She came in—a graceful, lady-like wo-

man, closely veiled. But the moment the servant retired the veil was raised, and Mr. Granby confronted his wife.

"You here!" he exclaimed, his face purpling.

"I fear I am not a welcome visitor," replied Mrs. Dorrington—for by that name, as the one of her election, she must still be designated. "But I may premise that I come on no disagreeable errand."

"I am astounded at your audacity in coming at all. I shall enter into no argument, but after leaving me as you did, how dare you present yourself within my threshold?"

"You must know why I left you. Because you entrapped me into marriage by a worthless settlement, for which I should have forfeited my own certain income, if I hadn't discovered, at the same time, that the Granby estate belonged rightfully to Humphrey Barnard."

Mr. Granby met this speech with a mocking laugh.

"You may sneer," pursued Mrs. Dorrington, "but my knowledge of this fact gave me my freedom, at any rate, and has compelled you to leave me unmolested."

"You think so! Well, your knowledge will be of very little use to you henceforward. Of course, I simply state my opinion. But pray come to your present errand."

"My errand is this. If you keep the estate for life, your death will give it to Ralph, and nobody will be able to turn him out of it. And I think my silence entitles me to some interest in it: so I propose that Ralph shall marry my daughter."

Mr. Granby did not scoff at this proposition; on the contrary, he bent his brows meditatively.

"You know Fay has excellent prospects," continued Mrs. Dorrington; "she is the next of kin for Dorrington Manor, and a good marriage would secure her a remembrance from other relatives."

"Yes," sneered Mr. Granby, "rich people

are always ready to help those who are as well off as themselves. And I enter into their feelings. It is deuced annoying to think that when you are dead, a lot of relations who have no money of their own are enjoying themselves with yours, while you are gratified to fancy the gift of your money will make you remembered by the rich. This bears only laterally on your proposition; but it is something. Now tell me whether you have done anything in the matter with Ralph!"

"Nothing whatever—except that I have allowed him to see a good deal of Fay."

The Squire smiled.

"Well, I will think the matter over," he said. "All I can say now is, that I have no objection to the match—*if he wishes it.*"

"You must suggest it to him. Surely you can understand there are circumstances in the case"—Mrs. Dorrington referred to her own relations with Mr. Granby himself—"which will prevent his moving without your—your *encouragement.*"

"Am I to understand he will not lack *encouragement* from the young lady?" Mr. Granby nearly added "or the *old* one." But he was too much out of spirits even for a magisterial joke. "However," he continued, quickly, "I shall let you know more about it in a few days."

"And, pray remember, this marriage will relieve you of all apprehensions about Humphrey Barnard," said Mrs. Dorrington, significantly, as she rose.

"Humphrey Barnard will never give me any more trouble," replied Mr. Granby. "Look at these documents," and he placed two papers in her hand. "Here is a certificate of his death, and here is an attested declaration that he died unmarried."

It would be too much to say the papers took the colour from Mrs. Dorrington's cheek, for the colour, being artificial, remained, but its presence heightened her paleness. She not only felt that her husband had brought her to bay, but she conceived that he was now in a position to

bring her under his control, and for a moment she stood speechless. But Mr. Granby had reasons for not pushing his advantage, and he allowed her to depart unfettered.

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. GRANBY ALSO TAKES HIS GREAT STEP.

THE match with Fay Dorrington would not have been distasteful to Mr. Granby at an earlier period. That he hated her mother was not in itself an insurmountable objection, as he never allowed his feelings to interfere with his interests, and would have judged the project by the advantages it offered, rather than in relation to Mrs. Dorrington. It would afterwards be his care that Mrs. Dorrington took no profit by the event, but that, on the contrary, it worked to her confusion. Nor did he even now quite free himself from this idea. Was it not possible that Ralph had been smitten by Fay, or at least, so entangled, that it would be difficult for him to escape a pro-

posal of marriage? On the occasion of his seeing them together, they certainly appeared on the best terms, and he doubted not that Fay had been instructed by her mother, and knew both how to use her attractions, and to gain her object. The Squire pondered what should be done in such case. Should he give up the scheme he intended to propose to Ralph, and adopt the match with Fay? After all, the contingency his scheme was designed to meet might never arise, and he would then have taken a world of trouble for no purpose. At the same time, his proceedings would arouse the suspicions of Mrs. Dorrington, and provoke her to leave no stone unturned to discover his motives. These reflections led him now to waver a moment, but, in the end, he decided to adhere to his own plan,—at least, so far as to make trial of it. If he found Ralph free, he might contrive to blind Mrs. Dorrington for a time, and the completion of his purpose would enable him to bid her defiance. This resolve was

reached just as the servant ushered in Ralph.

Their greeting was very constrained, for while, on the one hand, Ralph smarted under the remembrance of his grievances, on the other, Mr. Granby felt he had no longer to deal with a dependent.

"I suppose you have heard all that has happened at Chesney, lately?" he said, hesitatingly.

"I have heard of nothing extraordinary," answered Ralph, coldly.

"You have at least seen the account about Bradley in this morning's newspapers?"

Ralph looked more interested.

"I was so engaged I could only glance at the leaders and debates," he said. "What has taken place?"

"An incendiary fire, and the dead body of Bradley has been found in the coppice, under circumstances which show he was the incendiary."

This announcement horrified Ralph. He

instantly associated the tragedy with Letty, and started to his feet in a way that alarmed Mr. Granby.

"The Riverses are all safe," Mr. Granby exclaimed, hastily.

"Safe! What do you mean? Why shouldn't they be safe? Who would dare to injure them? That madman? Tell me all he has done."

"What he intended to do, is not clear, but he fired all the ricks, and the house is burnt down."

"Well for me, and well for himself, he is dead!" exclaimed Ralph, frantically. "But I will go there at once."

"One moment!" cried Mr. Granby; "I don't oppose your going, but first hear what I have to say!"

"Not a word! To do so I should be void of honour, void of feeling. I must begone, while I retain my self-control."

"And what can you do?" exclaimed the Squire, excitedly. "Nothing!"

"That we shall see, sir!" cried Ralph,

suddenly facing him. "At present, I fling back your taunt. You have brought ruin on this honourable family, and you have disgraced me, blasted both my name and my life. If I can do nothing, what can you do? Can you"—and Ralph's lip curled bitterly—"give me back my wife?"

"That is my wish," said Mr. Granby, "*to give you back your wife.*"

Ralph had reached the door, but now stopped.

"This young lady is, as you say, really your wife," pursued Mr. Granby. "It was necessary to test the validity of the marriage: that has been done, and we find you must be married again to make the contract legal. I have written to Mr. Rivers, stating these facts." Here he produced a letter. "I have also mentioned that I shall charge the Granby property with a settlement on your wife, sufficient for a suitable establishment. Go down there to-night, and present the letter yourself." And he placed it in Ralph's hand.

This extraordinary generosity in his uncle so bewildered Ralph, that he knew not how to reply.

"Can I read this?" he said at length, scanning the address of the letter.

"As you like," replied Mr. Granby.

Ralph ran his eye through the epistle. It said all that was required, in a manner more polite than he expected, insomuch that he glanced up at his uncle in surprise. But Mr. Granby, wrapped in thoughts of his own, met his gaze unmoved. Ralph took his hand, in reconciliation.

"This letter repairs every wrong," he said, "and I hope will make us all friends."

Mr. Granby responded to his clasp, and Ralph went away full of hope, and without dreaming that his visit had been preceded by one from Mrs. Dorrington—respecting which, as well as the project it involved, Mr. Granby thought it prudent for the present to keep silence.

CHAPTER XXII.

FAY SHOWS HER SKILL IN PACKING.

It wanted but two hours to the departure of the train; but this allowed Ralph time to go home for his portmanteau, and drive round to excuse himself to Mr. Hargrave, and with light step and lightened heart he crossed the street to George Place.

But his path was beset by a lion. Mrs. Dorrington felt checked in her recent manœuvre. Not only had the death of Humphrey Barnard wrenched away her hold over Mr. Granby, but, at the moment she lost this vantage, she informed Mr. Granby of her designs on Ralph, without considering that his overture to Ralph showed he entertained some design of his own. Had

he betrayed her to Ralph? and could she learn what he contemplated himself? She must set herself to ascertain these points, and, if the way seemed clear, try by some means to fix Ralph. So she hurried home to admonish Fay, and then took her station outside, where she paced up and down the quiet precinct till Ralph should appear.

There was no overlooking his buoyant air when he came in sight.

"I congratulate you!" said Mrs. Dorrington. "You have been successful, and all is made up."

"Yes, my uncle and I are reconciled," replied Ralph.

"And what conditions has he imposed upon you, if our relationship justifies me in asking?"

"No conditions whatever, for he knows I would listen to none."

Mrs. Dorrington was very courtly in her manners—in fact, a thoroughbred, but she could not suppress an incredulous glance, the mode in which a thoroughbred, instead

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of plainly calling a spade a spade, intimates you are deviating from the truth.

"I must own you surprise me," she said, "and yet it is in keeping with his character. As he knew you would reject terms, he proposed none; but he is not the less bent on making you subserve some purpose."

"I see no ground for such a suspicion, and therefore I prefer to give him credit for good intentions. But don't let me interrupt your promenade. Indeed, I mustn't delay; for I am going down to Devonshire, and have only two hours for all my arrangements."

Mrs. Dorrington detained his hand.

"You mustn't go without bidding Fay good-bye," she said, caressingly. "As for your arrangements, what can you have to do? Ten minutes ought to pack up your things—Fay and I will help you; and another twenty will take you to the station; so you have exactly an hour-and-a-half to play with."

"How difficult it is to make ladies understand business!"

"Yes—or gentlemen either. What have we to do with business?"

"You quite ignore my secretaryship," smiled Ralph. "I shall want at least an hour for Mr. Hargrave."

"And you shan't give him a minute," laughed Mrs. Dorrington—"not a minute! Come now, Ralph, be amiable. Leave me to settle with the Hargraves, and you take luncheon with us, when I shall have round the carriage, and Fay and I will go with you to Paddington and see you off."

This proposition mesmerised Ralph. He felt as if he had no power to resist, and he allowed Mrs. Dorrington to drag him into the house, and present him to Fay.

Fay was by nature light-hearted. She had moments of dejection, when all was gloom, but soon her sprightly imagination carried her to brighter moods. In the same way there were times when she searched out all her defaults, and reproached herself for

worldliness, hypocrisy, and deceit, resolving to indulge these habits no more. And for a while the good purpose held firm, keeping her under a healthful discipline. But the worldly seed had been implanted too deep to be utterly and at once plucked up. Constantly her mother led her back to the old training, and she began to think her fate inevitable, trying to take comfort in the remembrance that Ralph was a kind and pleasant fellow, while, in fact, she gave her heart to Isaac Wingfield.

Such was the disposition into which she had been lectured on this occasion, and, consequently, she met Ralph with a smile.

"Now, I won't have you two running into a gossip," Mrs. Dorrington cried, as Ralph jumped into talk. "Remember, we have to pack the portmanteau, and to get luncheon, and order the carriage. And Fay, you have to put on your bonnet, which always takes half-an-hour."

"What am I to put on my bonnet for?" demanded Fay.

"We are going with Ralph to Paddington."

"You can put on your bonnet while I am packing," smiled Ralph, "so we shall save time there. Indeed, my portmanteau has hardly been unpacked yet, and I have only to run upstairs and tumble some traps into it from the top of the drawers, and be down again in a minute."

"No! no!" exclaimed Mrs. Dorrington. "I know what a gentleman's minute means, and, besides, I don't approve of such careless packing. If the traps, as you call them, are on the top of the drawers, I shall see all brought down here, and we will pack them for you properly."

"Do let us!" cried Fay. "It will be a bit of fun!"

"Yes; but we must have luncheon first," said Mrs. Dorrington.

And she rang the bell.

What could Ralph do? He wanted luncheon; he had to get through a couple of hours, and, in his present excitement,

this could not be done better than in good company. So he sat down, and the luncheon passed very merrily, the champagne giving them all a fillip, and they might have lingered too long, only the remembrance of Letty, more potent than wine, or even wit, kept Ralph to time. But vainly he attempted to infringe the programme: Mrs. Dorrington insisted on the packing clause, and the smiling housemaid brought down the portmanteau, and then reappeared with the "traps from the top of the drawers." These, dislodged from her arms, were taken in charge by Fay, and by her, in spite of a cross-fire from Ralph and Mrs. Dorrington, so cleverly packed, that Ralph afterwards found she had omitted nothing but his tooth-brush and slippers.

Mrs. Dorrington now noticed that Fay was excited, though not in a degree to be observed by Ralph, and, for her own part, she considered a certain flutter to be inseparable from an interest in the state of affairs. Hence she made no remark upon it,

but merely urged Fay to hasten her toilet, which Fay amiably did, and soon they were all in the carriage on their way to the station.

Fay was not surprised when her mother suddenly recollected she owed a call in Spring Gardens.

"You can set me down at the corner, Fay," Mrs. Dorrington added, "and I will afterwards go on to Hargrave's, where you can take me up on your return."

"Pray let me drive on to the station in a hansom," cried Ralph. "I am ashamed to carry off your carriage and Fay too."

"If Fay has no more objection to your carrying her off than I have to your carrying off the carriage, you have nothing to be ashamed of," returned Mrs. Dorrington. "What do you say, Fay?"

"I am dumb," answered Fay; "you and Ralph must settle everything."

The last words were uttered in a tone that made Ralph look up, but it was only to see Mrs. Dorrington laugh.

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"Then all is settled," she said, "and you have only to do as we tell you ; eh, Ralph ?"

She nodded adieu, and stepped down from the carriage, leaving Fay and Ralph to pursue the journey alone.

For a few minutes they talked on, but Fay, though her flushed cheek showed no diminution of excitement, then lost her vivacity. The silence was rather welcome to Ralph. He liked Fay, and took pleasure in her chat, but at this moment his whole mind and imagination flew to the errand on which he was bound. Very different were Fay's thoughts. She knew she was left with him to provoke a declaration before they parted. Could the match between them, then, be so far arranged as her mother wished her to understand ? She pondered whether she might not use the opportunity to learn the truth. In such a design, she had to consider both the obstacle of delicacy, and the difficulty of avoiding expressions which might commit her to a particular course. To approach the subject without

some revelation of her feelings seemed hardly possible, and at one moment bold, at another unnerved, and more and more terrorised by her mother, she was too conscious of vacillation to be sure that she might not ultimately be driven into Ralph's arms.

In this mood she abruptly exclaimed—"I should like——"

Here she stopped with the same abruptness.

"What?" cried Ralph.

"Well, it is very tantalizing of mama," answered Fay, vainly struggling against a blush, "but she keeps saying that you and herself have come to an explanation, and have settled, and I don't know what else. Now I wish you would tell me what the explanation is about, and what you really have settled; that is" (and Fay's blush deepened, and she spoke very quickly, remembering she might now be rushing on the very rock she desired to avoid), "that is, if it has nothing to do with me."

"What a stipulation!" cried Ralph.

"But to tell the truth, I hardly know what is explained and settled. I only hope we shall all be satisfied at last, and gratified too."

This answer was very ambiguous, but on the whole it tended to confirm Fay in the impression she derived from her mother; hence it made her more sad than before. But it aroused her pride, and she lashed herself into a flow of talk to conceal her dejection. Great was her relief when the carriage reached the terminus, and Ralph sprang out.

"Just time to shake hands, and that is all," he said. "Now, mind you take care."

"I give you the same counsel," answered Fay. "As to myself, all the care is taken off my hands, you know."

She spoke with a smile, but her tone disturbed Ralph, and he cast a glance back at her as he disappeared in the station.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FAY SHOWS MORE SKILL.

THE carriage was wheeling off, when Fay caught sight of another acquaintance—her cousin, Isaac Wingfield, coming, bag in hand, from the platform. He was looking round for a cab, when he perceived Fay.

“I am so glad to see you,” Fay said. “Now give your bag to the coachman, and I will take you home.”

The Pastor accepted the proposal, and the carriage bore them off.

“You don’t express surprise at meeting me in this high latitude,” said Fay, “so I suppose I must assume the same unconcern as to the reason of your being here.”

The tremor in her voice did not evince unconcern, but it escaped Isaac's notice.

"I have been down in Devon," he replied.

"In Devon!" returned Fay, "and back so quick!"

"I stayed only a few hours. There have been shocking events there, at my friend Mr. Rivers's, and it was by mere accident I heard of them. I went off directly to see if I could be of service."

"Pray tell me what has occurred," said Fay.

The Pastor complied with her request while she listened attentively.

"You may conceive how dreadfully these things have shaken me," he continued, "and what terror I suffered about Alice, exposed to such danger!"

"But you know she was saved," answered Fay.

"Yes."

They were both silent a moment.

"Who is this brave fellow that rescued her?" asked Fay. "Did you see him?"

"No! I called at his house, but he had gone to London."

"Have you ever seen him?"

"I know him well—as worthy a man as ever stepped—a man descended from old Saxon lords, though a labourer himself till lately. But, glad I am to say it, he now has a freehold farm of his own."

"I must ask a lady's question," cried Fay, with affected lightness. "Is he a bachelor?"

The Pastor gave a quick look up.

"Alice will marry him!" said Fay, without waiting for his answer.

The Pastor's eyes dropped again.

"I fear I have wounded you," continued Fay, tenderly, "yet I would not unsay the words, because it is better you should know the truth, see it and face it. Yes, and a time shall come when you will think tranquilly even of the event."

The Pastor sighed.

"It is your wish she should be happy?" pursued Fay.

"Assuredly."

"And what could more insure her happiness than to marry such a man as you describe, and who has, at the same time, risked his life to preserve hers? Think what a bond of love is there!"

"I acknowledge it."

"But look at it in another way. Suppose she were still engaged to you, with the feelings she entertained for you. This fire and this deliverance would have occurred just the same; and she would have been subject to the same attraction. *Could she have married you? Could you wish to have married her?*

The Pastor was silent.

"I seem to be cruel," resumed Fay, mournfully. "Say, Isaac, whether you think I speak in bitterness or sympathy."

"In bitterness—who could suppose it!" answered the Pastor with emotion. "No, you put before me the truth in the clearest but still the softest light. Thank you, thank you, Fay. You remember the Apos-

tle's charge, 'Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.' And that is what I have to do, too; what I must learn to do."

Here the sudden stop of the carriage brought the conversation to an end.

"I forgot to mention we were to call at Mr. Hargrave's for mama," said Fay. "Perhaps you may like to go in and see them all? I shall not alight myself."

"Nor I," answered the Pastor—"that is, unless my aunt would expect it."

"I think she would rather we remained here, which will make her retreat easier," said Fay.

In truth, Mrs. Dorrington felt so eager to learn how Fay had managed with Ralph, that she presented herself at the door almost before it lost the vibration of the footman's knock. She was not pleased to see Fay accompanied by the Pastor, but, as a "thoroughbred," she knew how to disguise such feelings, and Fay soon set the matter right. The explanation was made while Mrs. Dor-

rington settled herself in the carriage, a proceeding which some urchins, who were performing trapeze by standing on their heads on the pavement, watched with wonder, seeing her first loll on one side, and then on the other, now seeming to be caught by an invisible fastening here, then there, after which she shook out her dress in front, and was still in motion when the carriage drove off. Fay now led the Pastor into a narrative of the fire at the farm, which, to her surprise, so interested Mrs. Dorrington, that she never opened her lips till he concluded.

"What a strange story?" she then exclaimed. "Did you see anything of this unlucky family, the Riverses?"

"My visit was made to them," replied Isaac Wingfield; "and it was from them I received the account."

Fay felt her heart lightened: she now knew he had not sought a meeting with Alice.

"Did you get a glimpse of the young lady?" asked Mrs. Dorrington.

"What young lady?" replied the pastor, paling.

"Well, I really don't know how to designate her. Let us say the nameless—the divorced!"

Mrs. Dorrington spoke with a sarcastic smile, but Fay noticed that her tone betrayed uneasiness.

"I ask you to remember this lady is a dear friend of mine, aunt," rejoined the Pastor, looking hurt.

"Very good! but did you see her, or hear anything of her?" rejoined Mrs. Dorrington, eagerly.

"I can tell you nothing about her, except that she has left home for a time."

"That is something," returned Mrs. Dorrington, with a breath of relief: she had been wondering whether the events at the farm had any connexion with Ralph's journey, and his reconciliation with his uncle. "I suppose," she added, "the whole family will leave Chesney now?"

"That is their intention," answered the

Pastor; "but they will remain in the neighbourhood, as Mr. Rivers has accepted a farm under Sir Charles Raven."

"Why, Sir Charles Raven is an old friend of mine, and I never knew he had a property in Devonshire."

"He has only just purchased it."

"I declare we will make him invite us down, Fay."

Here the carriage again stopped, drawing up at Mr. Grip's door, and Fay was spared the necessity of reply.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BABBICOMBE DOWNS.

LETTY and Alice arrived at their quarters in Ilsham Road at the moment when their hostess, having lost her winter visitors, entertained no other inmates, so they found themselves very agreeably lodged. Standing on a height, which had the town of Torquay at its foot, the Warberry-hill on its flank, and the beautiful vale of Ilsham in its rear, the villa was surrounded by pleasant walks, which the two girls never wearied of exploring. The vale of Ilsham carried them by a sweep to the sea, the green heights on one side being crowned by the woods of Manor House, the marine residence of the old Devon family of Palk,

while the road, by a gentle descent, led past the ancient farmhouse, which, in monastic days, was an out station of Tor Abbey. On the one hand they might prolong their ramble to New Cut, on the other to Daddy's Hole Plain, both bournes of charm ; or they could leave the vale behind, and either descend to Babbicombe Downs, or climb a steep to the top of the Warberry. Letty preferred the Downs, which form a terrace, turfed like a lawn, round one side of Babbicombe Bay ; and here she was seated with Alice, on the morning they come again under notice. From their rustic bench, the ground shelved to a precipice, falling to the beach, which, composed of chalk flints, seemed, in the sunlight, to belt the mirror-like sea with silver. The eye swept the bottom of the bay, encircled by broken cliffs and verdant slopes, dotted by villas and then by the parades of Teignmouth and Dawlish, till the coast faded in the distance into blue hills, streaked with the white houses of Exmouth.

Was it the spell of this prospect which kept the two girls silent? Too evidently not. Easy to see the thoughts of both were absent, and not pleasurable. Change of air and scene had benefited their looks, giving back to their cheeks the Devonshire rose, and Alice seemed to be regaining her old strength. But there came moody fits, when these good signs failed to conceal inward disquiet; and both girls were under such a cloud at the present moment.

"What can you be thinking about, Letty?" said Alice, at length.

"I might put the same question to you," answered Letty, slightly starting at this interruption of her reverie.

"As to that, I have a good mind to tell you," half sighed Alice.

"Such a good mind should be allowed to have its way; so speak out, and I will give you all my ears."

"Now I think you will laugh at me," returned Alice, with her little pettishness.

"You forget what your papa said—that I

was not to let you be serious. However, we must disobey the doctor sometimes, so I shall humour you. For to be serious, indeed, dear Alley, I know you have a weight within which only loving sympathy can lighten."

"*You know!*" exclaimed Alice, with a blush, while her eyes brimmed with tears.

"So much together as we are, and constantly hearing your opinions, how could I but know?"

"If you know, I needn't tell you," pouted Alice. "But I can't think I have been so—so——"

"Unguarded," remarked Letty, with a winning look. "But so it is, Alley, and I have thought a great deal about it too—at times."

"That is just like you—thinking of others when they are thinking only of themselves," returned Alice, penitentially. "Now tell me your honest opinion, dear Letty."

"I can form none—that is, as to how things will end. Nor does it seem to me

that we have much voice in the matter. We drift, rather than move, and if it happen that we are left to do as we wish—I don't know, Alley"—(Letty here averted her face)—“but I believe we are as likely to make a false step as a right one.”

“Why do you think this?”

“Because we are guided by our feelings.”

“Can we have a better guide than our own feelings, when they are good?”

“How shall we know they *are* good, or even true? Can we tell that our desire now, is what we shall desire always, or even a year hence? May it not prove the very reverse of what we anticipate, and not only disappoint, but crush? They say it is often so in marriage. And who could predict that my own marriage would end so miserably?”

“That makes you think a happy one impossible.”

“No; I only say we should look before we leap, and that is what we never do.”

“Never?”

"As a rule, I mean. Even those who marry from mercenary motives, and whom we may suppose the most alert, can't take into account anything but their present object, and they attain this, and then find there is still a void."

"If I were free to marry, and made my choice"—here a blush suffused Alice's face—

"I should have no misgiving."

"Because you are in love."

"And that is the best reason—a woman's reason. And do you know the effect it would have on me? It would lead me to meet every fortune with but one thought—how to cheer and gladden my husband: it would make him all my joy and my hope, and my life; and though he became sick or decrepid—nay, even if he belied all my anticipations, and changed to an evil nature, I believe this love of mine would be strong enough still to paint him to me in his first likeness."

"And what likeness is that, dear Alley?"

"One that contents me, and you say you know it."

“And you say it will always content you?”

“For ever—till my last breath.”

“Then, I am satisfied.”

“There! I have gained over one—the one I care about most, next to papa. You were right, Letty. My weight was to be lightened by loving sympathy, and that you have given me. Now we will walk home.”

CHAPTER XXV.

ANSTEY'S COVE.

WHEN Letty and Alice reached their lodging, little time remained before their two o'clock dinner; and, just as it was announced, they were surprised by a visit from Mr. Mead. Of course, they made him consent to stop the rest of the day, which gave him an opportunity of seeing, by their improved appetite, how much they had profited by the Torquay air. The doctor was full of news, and seemed in extraordinary spirits, insomuch that Letty could not help fancying he kept something back, and she whispered her suspicion to Alice. Challenged thereupon by Alice, the doctor replied by banter, and repeated his whole

budget of intelligence to show he had omitted nothing.

"I have told you," he said, "of the Squire's offer of the farm, which you knew before, and how Mr. Rivers very properly declined it."—Letty's glance showed she shared this opinion—"and has taken a farm from Sir Charles Raven, and what a small house it is—though a pretty one, too, and how they are now moving into it, and Mrs. Rivers begs Letty won't return till they are quite settled; and I have told you all the gossip of Chesney, and—and——"

"Still there is more to tell," cried Alice. "But I know it is burning to come out, so pray take your time, papa. Letty and I are in no hurry."

"You won't get it out of me by swagger, I can tell you," laughed the doctor.

"There! he owns there is something!" exclaimed Alice.

"Now you must tell it, doctor," said Letty.

"Well, I shall see how you behave," re-

joined Mr. Mead. "As Alice says, there is no hurry, so you can take me one of your pretty walks, and I may seize an opportunity to make a full confession."

"Very good," said Alice. "Where shall we go, Letty? Not to Babbicombe again."

"Do you like Anstey's Cove?" answered Letty.

Anstey's Cove was highly approved of, and the girls went off to dress, promising to be back by the time the doctor put on his overcoat. This task, however, was performed quicker than they reckoned upon, for the doctor was carrying on a little underplot, and sallied from the house on this errand as soon as he heard them upstairs. To let out his secret, he had come over to Ilsham Road in company with Ralph. On receiving the Squire's letter, Mr. Rivers no longer objected to Ralph's seeing Letty, but suggested that she had gone through so much excitement, it would be better to give her the benefit of the fortnight's quiet at Ilsham, delaying their meeting till her

return. Ralph yielded to his counsel, but with such evident regret, that Mr. Rivers, sympathising with his feelings, consented that he should accompany the apothecary in this visit, and if Letty appeared sufficiently strong, at once seek an explanation. The doctor dropped him at a Torquay hotel, where he enjoined him to take luncheon, and then walk up to St. Matthias's church, and await his report. At this rendezvous they met.

"May I see her, or not?" cried Ralph, before the doctor could speak.

"We must manage to bring you together without our intervention being apparent," replied Mr. Mead. "She seems composed, but her pulse is feeble, which in her shows depression of the system. If you come upon her unawares, the surprise might have a good effect, but the fuss of preparation by Alice or myself, and a meeting with you afterwards, would agitate her too much."

"I would rather defer the meeting till she goes home, than expose her to any risk,"

said Ralph, anxiously. "And, if you think it advisable, I shall be satisfied only to see her, without showing myself."

"You shall both see her and speak to her. Alice and I are going for a walk with her directly, to Anstey's Cove, over there,"—the doctor indicated the direction,—“and you can keep us in view. There are two ways to it—one by the road, the other through Bishopstowe Wood—and you must watch to catch her by herself. I am too old to plan such things, but I will take Alice into counsel, and, between us, we will contrive to make you an opening, if you are by to seize it.”

While this was passing, Letty and Alice discovered the doctor's absence, and they were coming forth to see where he had strayed, when he appeared, breathless, in the porch.

"Walking up hills doesn't suit me," he said, in excuse for his blown condition. "But every place has its drawbacks, and Torquay would be a doctors' Paradise if you

could have the scenery and shelter without the hills—and the smells.”

“Why did you go out without us?” asked Alice, unsympathisingly.

“It wasn’t to visit a *patient*,” replied her father, with a knowing air.

“You won’t be troubled with hill in going to Anstey’s Cove,” Letty said to the doctor, “as, by the road, it is all descent, and we can come back through the wood, which is so pretty you won’t have time to notice you are climbing. Do you agree, Alley?”

Alice assented, and they set off, soon entering a lane, which, verifying Letty’s description, was all down-hill. In the way they caught noble glimpses of the sea—here apparent between undulations of the cliffs, here through a vista of wood; and the bright sky, the green fields, and the clear blue of the waters, sometimes flashed by the sun, beguiled the eye with new effects at every step. Lower down they entered a road running right and left, half-

way down the declivity, and from which they saw, as from a terrace, the open English Channel, with no bound but the horizon. On the other side of the road was a rustic gate, opening a beautiful dell, and Titania herself could not ask a smother carpet than the soft turf which it spread under their feet, and which presently took every diversity of level—bank, and rise, and slope, and plateau. A path ran along the side, but the prettiest descent was straight down, over the green, whence you looked up at the enclosing heights, backward to Bishopstowe Wood, and in front saw the wide expanse of water showing itself, on nearer approach, at the very foot of the declivity. Here, indeed, lay the Cove, walled on one side by a natural jetty of red rock, on the other by a projecting cliff, and receiving the smooth tide on a strip of beach. Sweeter nook could not be,—now a garden, now a wilderness, now a secluded haven, such a spot as the old Greeks made the haunt of divinities; it struck the mind with an idealising effect,

disposing it to romance. Deeply was this influence felt by Letty, who here always gave herself up to dreamy reveries, running into the fancies which Harry Clayton called *illusions*. From these she was startled, on rounding a green bank, by the appearance of Harry himself.

The artist sprang up from his work, and there was a burst of greetings, which seemed to betoken the surprise was equally agreeable to all. Certainly it charmed Harry, and he left his easel and its appurtenances in charge of his small boy, and walked on with the party, to show them the points from which they could best see the varied beauties of the Cove.

This afforded the doctor an opportunity of stealing aside with Alice, and telling her his story about Ralph, though in so disjointed a way that, at first, she hardly understood his object. But she gave him a look, which intimated that from that moment she relieved him of the management of affairs.

Harry proved a first-rate guide, and the Cove seemed to continually transform itself under his exhibition, changing its aspects like a kaleidoscope, so that you might now fancy yourself on the shores of Geneva, now in a nook of the Riviera, and now in a dell of the Isle of Wight. At last nothing met the eye but the sea, and, yielding to a poetic impulse, Letty murmured the words of the poet—

“How happy they,
Who, from the toil and turmoil of their lives,
Steal to look down where nought but ocean strives !”

“If that be true, you are happy now,” replied Harry.

Letty, who intended the words for Alice, looked up, and found she and Harry were by themselves.

“Where are they gone?” she asked.

And, as she spoke, she saw the doctor, with his back towards them, on an adjacent rise, apparently looking out for Alice, who had disappeared.

"They will be back directly," replied Harry, "and, meanwhile, you may enjoy your quiet look at the waves."

"I am afraid it will be no enjoyment to you," answered Letty, "so we will go after our friends."

"To tell you the plain truth, the doctor enjoined me to keep you here a minute, but I know I can do nothing if you are not held captive by the spot. For this is, as you say, a scene to make us forget for a moment the sordid cares of life, though I can't affirm that the impression rises to the point of happiness."

"Not in the usual sense of the term, but it is happiness in a degree, suggesting thoughts untinged by the weariness of the world."

"It is sad to hear such words as these from the lips of blooming eighteen! If I appear presumptuous in saying so, forgive me! Indeed, I can't aver that I agree with the sentiment—not but what it is natural we should differ on this point, because you feel as a lady, I as a man."

"You like the toil and turmoil?"

"For the present, till I have fulfilled my destiny."

"Do they who believe in a destiny ever fulfil it?" said Letty.

She spoke in an abstracted tone, as if her mind ran on some unuttered thought.

"If," replied Harry, "they believe persistently, believe through good fortune and evil, through every failure and reverse, then I think they do."

"As in everything else, there must be faith," said Letty, with a half ironic smile.

"Faith and good works!" rejoined Harry. "Belief must be combined with effort, and in fact the belief will prompt effort, and sustain and shape it."

"This is making destiny, not receiving it."

"I prefer to make it, to win it, to take it with my own hands, as Napoleon snatched his crown from the Pope and placed it on his head himself."

"That is very well for Napoleons ; yes"—here Letty broke into one of her sad smiles—"and for clever artists, too, and, perhaps, for men in general. You are all workers, and can fix your own goal. But your theory of destiny breaks down with us—with women. We may have faith, but it must be void of works, because there is nothing for us to do. We can't snatch crowns from Popes, and place them on our own head. For us it is only to believe, and—be undeceived. And such scenes as this may reconcile us to our lot—I won't say *destiny*."

"Ah! do say destiny, and make it so; for the power to make it rests with you, as much as with me," exclaimed Harry, carried away equally by the fascination of her sensibility and that of her beauty, and like herself feeling the spell of the spot. "From the first time we met, I felt your power over me, and soon I gave you my heart. But while I panted for the moment when I might honourably avow my love, you were snatched

from me, seemingly for ever. It was not so. You are now at full liberty, and may listen to my pleading. Do not—oh! do not reject it!”

Letty stood as if she heard not, but Harry saw the impress of his words on her face, and felt they had sunk into her soul. Was she nerving herself for some resolution?—considering and pondering—perhaps wavering! The intensity of the moment made him dread its continuance.

“Letty! Letty! give me your answer!”

The answer came, though in a voice so low that it was rather seen by the movement of her lips than heard by the ear. Yet Harry caught the tone, and for some minutes they talked in the same strain, each showing that the subject engaged their deepest feelings. Then they turned to meet Mr. Mead and Alice, whom they saw coming up.

How had Letty responded to the proposal? What was her decision? There could be no outward demonstration, as they had been all the time in sight of the apothecary, and

her lowered voice kept the secret. Enough to know they understood each other ; only it might be asked, *did Letty understand herself?*

CHAPTER XXVI.

BISHOPSTOWE.

ALICE had not disappeared without her father's connivance, or, indeed, his contrivance. They agreed she should steal away to Ralph, and concert with him how he should come upon Letty at a spot where they would leave her by herself, and, on her return, Alice felt too guilty to be able to note that Letty looked agitated. To cover her own embarrassment, she partnered herself on Harry, making him walk on with her, while Letty and the doctor followed. At the road they all stood a moment, bidding Harry good-bye, and then the two girls and the doctor crossed to the wood.

A wicket admitted them to a rugged path,

winding up a steep, with a wilderness of tree and underwood growing in the hollow, and, a little way above, covering the height on the other side. The path being narrow, and bordering a ridge, they were obliged to walk singly, Alice going first, talking as she went to Letty, who came close behind. Thus they swept round a curve, and reached the crest of the hill, when Alice, casting a look behind, missed her father.

“He must have gone the other way,” she said, “but I shall go and look for him. You stay here a little while.”

Letty was by no means unwilling. Tired by the climb, she not only welcomed a moment to compose herself, but was glad to rest, and, as Alice turned away, she sat down on the ledge of a rock, which, bursting through the bank, reared a cyclopean wall to the wood hanging above. Wall and bank were festooned with creepers, in every form of leaf and every shade of green; and, in front, the soil sank in a depth of trees, rising in all heights, and often grotesque shapes—

giants of a century side by side with saplings. There was here also the same profusion of creeper, spreading like the bed of this sylvan gulf, masking stumps, enwreathing bush and briar, and twining up the tallest trees. All wore the fresh livery of spring, so pleasant and hopeful, when Nature, in its presage of bloom, recalls the brightness of childhood. Some flash of childhood's dreams, indeed, might recur to the eye, as it saw through the foliage the not distant sea, fading, like the future, in cloud, but cloud of amber and rose colour; and it has been shown that Letty was too open to such enchantments. But now her glance swept round, and after noting the white pile of Bishopstowe, peering through the trees, she forgot both the future and the present in a retrospect of the past.

Manifest it was that the meditation brought sorrowful thoughts, some flushing her cheek, and some paling her lips, while her bosom quivered with suppressed emotion. Yet after a few minutes, she seemed

to rally, and gradually resumed her usual air.

This changed to a look of distraction as, raising her eyes, she found herself confronted by Ralph. He was darting forward to clasp her in his arms, when her wild glance arrested his steps.

"Letty, I have come to beg your pity," he said, in eager accents, "and to prove I have had nothing to do with this divorce, by urging you to publicly renew our union."

Instead of making a reply, she averted her face.

"Ah, can you meet me thus, dearest Letty. After so cruel a separation, not a word—not a look!"

Her form swayed, as if she were falling, but she contrived to hold herself up.

"I know you have much to forgive," continued Ralph, passionately. "If I have suffered, what suffering must have been yours, exposed to such stabs, such shocks! Dear, dear Letty; I have thought of all this, day and night—and been all but mad-

dened by it. Yes, I have been ready to curse myself for bringing this sorrow on my love."

Here Letty looked round with a glance blending reproach and scorn.

"Your love!" she murmured.

Look and tone cut him to the quick. He fell back a step, as if his breast had received a thrust. But his answer came in a voice rather pleading than complaining.

"My love, dear Letty—yourself, yourself! Can you tell me you are not? Can you think—can you ever have believed, I had any part in these cruel and infamous proceedings? Oh, cast such a suspicion out of your heart—which showed its trust in me under a trial as bitter—the moment of our separation."

Again Letty averted her face.

"Do I recall that anguish! Forgive me, and consider what it imposed on me! what pain, what sacrifice!"

"I am glad you remember the sacrifice," exclaimed Letty—"for it was honour! the

vows you had just uttered, the wife you had just wedded, and whom you instantly abandoned."

"Can you say these harsh words to me, Letty?"

"I say them to you, sir!"

They were both silent.

"Why do you come here?" Letty then cried. "You have repudiated me, you have cast me off, you have made me a mark for scorn to point at—you, who hunted me down, who lured me into an unlawful marriage"—here she rose to her feet and stood confronting him—"why do you still pursue me, Ralph Granby? Is it to drag me into some new pit? Is it to utterly blast me? Go, sir, and leave me to the misery you have made bitter enough."

"Letty, I take the blame. I acknowledge that my acts have brought misery upon you—very great and very bitter misery. But my vows are unbroken; for all the love I vowed for you, I still feel. And if you retain any for me, your misery and my own

are at an end. There are no longer any obstacles to our union. I come here to plead for it; your father gives his sanction, and my uncle not only consents to it, but desires it."

"Your uncle!" exclaimed Letty. "No lips but his own shall persuade me of this."

With these words, uttered in accents trembling with emotion, and with eyes cast down, she turned away, in the direction of the upper road.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ALICE PRONOUNCES HER OPINION.

THE reconciliation of Letty and Ralph was desired by all ; and now that the Squire had withdrawn his opposition, and even sought to promote their union, no one doubted that Letty would welcome the overture. Hence Alice and her father walked home, believing she would make her appearance in Ralph's company. Great was their disappointment when Letty came in alone, and, instead of inviting their congratulations, seemed ready to drop from exhaustion.

Letty perfectly understood they had been acting in concert with Ralph. Nevertheless, she made no allusion to the meeting, leaving them to draw their conclusions from

her silence. This did not satisfy the apothecary, and he shortened his visit, in order that he might learn the facts from Ralph, whom he doubted not to find at the hotel.

Alice had now an opportunity of soothing Letty.

"You forgive my share in this plot, dear!" she said, as soon as they were alone. "We thought to save you pain, and it struck us you would be spared a good deal by meeting him in that way."

"You couldn't have arranged better," replied Letty; "and I have not only nothing to forgive, but much to thank you for."

"Of course, it was trying for you to see him," pursued Alice, "and it has visibly shaken you, but it was a thing that must be gone through, and if"—here she put her hand on Letty's, and bent forward to peer up at her—"if all is forgiven and forgotten—"

"Forgotten!" exclaimed Letty. "Oh! how could it be!"

Alice looked startled.

"It were better forgotten," she faltered, after a pause; "but I dare say great wrongs will remain in the memory, even when we feel no resentment. Still, you forgive, dear?"

Letty shaded her eyes, but Alice saw tears on her cheek.

"Oh! you do forgive!" Alice now said, in pleading accents; "for your own sake, Letty! Now that your father approves; now that even Mr. Granby has given way; you haven't—surely, you haven't repulsed him? You haven't been so cruel to both him and yourself?"

"Cruel to *him*!"

"Yes, to *him*—to Ralph Granby. If you have rejected his offer of reparation, I tell you it was cruel, and your resentment has made you do what you will repent of."

"What I shall do in the end, I needn't now say; but as yet I have neither rejected nor accepted him."

"That is something," returned Alice, with

a loving caress. "I hoped, indeed, all would have been happily settled when you talked it over together, but I can now conceive you oughtn't to be too forward. Only you mustn't make difficulties, Letty."

"Is it this, if I do not allow myself to be cast down and taken up again, at Mr. Granby's pleasure—more than cast down, trampled under foot! Do not think so, Alley! Receive my stabs on your own bosom, and then you will see there is no need to make difficulties."

"I think only of yourself," answered Alice, subdued, having never before heard Letty speak so severely. "What you have suffered, I can understand—nay, I have partly seen, and my heart has bled for you." Letty clasped her hand, and tears rose to Alice's eyes. "It is because I wouldn't have you suffer more I urge you to be temperate now," she added, earnestly.

"You shall hear how we parted," rejoined Letty. "Ralph Granby told me his uncle, who has just divorced us, now wishes

us to be re-married, and I said I could only be persuaded of this by his uncle's own lips."

"Then you will never be persuaded of it."

"Possibly."

"Can you ever have loved Ralph Granby?" said Alice, wondering. "Hitherto I have never doubted it, but now it seems impossible; for how could love exact a condition which your best friends will pronounce unreasonable? Do you suppose that proud man will so transform himself as to yield to your caprice?—I can give it no other name, dear Letty."

"Be it so," replied Letty, in a tone that showed she wished to end the conversation.

But she brought up the point herself next day, when the evening post brought a note from her father, which, after carefully reading, she handed to Alice. The billet ran thus:—

"MY DEAREST LETTY,

"I snatch a moment from our

employments to tell you we have both thought seriously over your letter, acquainting us with the result of your meeting with Ralph Granby. I can't say, my child, that it is what we wished, but we are of one mind as to the greatness of your provocation. Ralph Granby considers you are entitled to the satisfaction you require from his uncle. All I desire is to see my Letty happy. Pray remain at Ilsham till Alice returns. With our love to you both, your affectionate father,

“OLIVER RIVERS.”

“You see what Ralph Granby thinks,” Letty said, as Alice gave back the letter.

“I see how he loves,” answered Alice.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AT HOME.

WHATEVER the feelings aroused in Letty's breast by the renewed suit of Ralph, under circumstances so exciting, and whatever her intentions with respect to Harry—on other points she remained under the discipline she had set herself. This gave her disposition a sweetness which nothing could disturb. And here she found a refuge from the storm of emotion which burst upon her at the meeting in the wood, while it helped her to shut out both that experience and Ralph himself. She would not think of Ralph; she turned even from the memory of her wrongs, and kept only in view that she was training herself to accept cheerfully the conditions of

her lot. It should be her first aim, on returning home, to show both her father and stepmother that she was reconciled to her altered fortunes; and she pondered in what way she might employ herself, so as to be useful in the business of the farm. This self-exercise and these reflections sheltered her from her secret impulses. It was as if she were undergoing a novitiate, preparatory to taking vows of seclusion, and stood aloof alike from the world and her own nature.

Soon the term of her visit to Ilsham expired, though not before her father had taken possession of his new farm, which, being close to Brixham, allowed of her proceeding home by railway. Mr. Rivers was to meet her and Alice at the station, and carry them both on, it being arranged that Alice should stay a few days at the farm, and so have the benefit of another change before returning to Chesney.

Mr. Rivers awaited their appearance in a light cart, the first thing to try Letty's en-

duration, as, emerging from the station, she missed the dashing horse and well-appointed wagonette of a few weeks before. But, if dimmed an instant, her eye brightened at sight of her father himself, looking as cheerful as if nothing had happened, and she flew up to him with smiling face. Alice was no less radiant, and presently all three were talking together and all at once, as the cart bore them away.

A short two miles brought them to Fairdale, as the farmhouse was called, and which, being situated very prettily in a field, presented a better appearance than Letty expected. The door was opened by their old housemaid, Mary Elizabeth, who, in order to follow their fortunes, had voluntarily reduced herself into a servant of all work, though her pleasant, clean face might rather suggest a servant of *no* work; and the sound of their voices in the passage drew out Mrs. Rivers, who led them all into the parlour.

It was a cheerful room, with lookout over

field and lane, and Letty cast a satisfied glance at the furniture, which, if not so costly as that of their old home, conformed with modern taste. But neither she nor Alice subsided from their flurry till Mrs. Rivers agreed to conduct them over the whole house, and, while the farmer was putting up the horse, they explored every room, approving of each in succession.

"I hope you will let me manage the dairy now, mother," Letty said to Mrs. Rivers, on their return to the parlour. "You know I understand it, and Mary Elizabeth has enough to do, without that."

"La, Miss Letty! you'd never a-manage the butter," broke in Mary Elizabeth, who followed in their train with the tea-things. "Yer hands 'ud have to get as big again, and then they'd need to be case-hardened, and, all done, I doubt if you'd ever go swift enough."

"I see you don't want me to step into your shoes," smiled Letty.

"Yer might just as easy, Miss Letty,"

answered Mary Elizabeth, laughingly drawing back her dress, and displaying shoes no way resembling the glass slipper; "and they'd fit you as well as turnin' for butter would."

"Then I shall leave you the rough work, and take all the light," rejoined Letty. And she added to Mrs. Rivers, "Do you approve, mother?"

"If you wish it, and *have time*," replied Mrs. Rivers, with a slight stress on the last words.

Letty understood that she alluded to the possibilities opened by her relations with Ralph, and her cheek assumed a deeper rose. But she responded in a cheerful voice, "Then, I shall begin to-morrow."

Mrs. Rivers expected Letty to come home elated by the submission of Mr. Granby, and the prospect of becoming mistress of Granby Hall, and Letty's demand that the Squire should humble himself to tender this reparation in person, confirmed the expectation, seeming to the religious matron the

very height of pride. Consequently she was taken by surprise on finding Letty even gentler and more docile than ever. The discipline of the family misfortunes had chastened her own nature, and her religious instincts, while deepening their hold of her mind, unfolded and expanded, casting their sectarian gloom, and catching the light of charity. The career of Bradley shook her faith in the converted, even brought her to look with suspicion on pretensions to sanctity, and, as a natural consequence, to believe that people might be Christians without habitually quoting Scripture. It led her also to remember that she had done what she could to make Bradley Letty's husband, and thence she proceeded to review her whole conduct to Letty, asking herself whether she had fulfilled to her the part of a mother. There had, in truth, with little love, been no great failure, but her alarmed conscience recalled proofs of what she never recognised before, a secret antipathy, a jealous rivalry, and a design of diverting Letty's birthright

to her own son. Awfully was she admonished of her trespasses! The property she coveted had been devoured by fire, reducing herself and her husband to an inferior sphere, and a thunderbolt had seemed to strike down Bradley, with whom she was once leagued. On the other hand Letty, though she had gone through a period of suffering, was, by these overtures from the Granbys, receiving the fullest redress. In such events her tenets led her to see divine judgments and divine intervention; not that she came to such perception all at once; it was rather by gradual stages of thought, which brought her first to the capability of sympathising with Letty, and then to steadfastly seeking her affection.

With this good disposition she yet felt an aversion from speaking to Letty on the subject of the renewal of the marriage, not only because it awoke painful memories, but from a determination that the matter should entangle her no further. Mr. Rivers maintained the same reserve, though for a dif-

ferent reason. He wished Letty to act under the unbiassed dictate of her own judgment. And this Letty seemed resolved to do; for, content with having informed him by letter of the result of her meeting with Ralph, she showed no disposition to allude to the topic. Thus there was a tacit understanding to leave it unmentioned.

But such a matter could not be kept in abeyance. The evening post brought Mr. Rivers a letter from Ralph, informing him that his uncle, far from raising objections, entered gladly into Letty's proposal, and was running down to Devon expressly to avail himself of her permission to call. They proposed to pay their visit together the next day; and Ralph begged Mr. Rivers to announce this to Letty, as he felt interdicted from writing himself.

"You see, Letty hasn't touched on the subject to me, though I gave her an opportunity," the farmer observed to his wife, as he handed her Ralph's letter; "and it is so full of sore points, that it is natural she

should feel a little shrinking from it. I didn't like her stipulation about the Squire at the time, but I now see it was a proper one, or he wouldn't comply with it; and this disposes me, more than ever, to leave her to her own judgment. But I can't tell her of the letter without seeming to invite a consultation, so I think she had better hear of it from you."

"She has been as silent to me as to yourself," replied Mrs. Rivers, "but we know there are reasons why she should take it very seriously, and I have considered she is giving herself to preparation."

"Still, this reconciliation is to precede marriage, and it isn't well that she should come to it with too keen a remembrance of by-gones. You might hint this to her."

"For peace sake I will do what lies in me. Let it stay over till night, when I will go to her in her own room, where we shall be free from interruption."

Letty retired with no anticipation of this

conference, but yet with her mind haunted by the subject it related to. Now that she was again at home, she found it impossible to avoid thinking of the contingencies approaching, though she would only see them from one point, and turned even from this, as soon as rising emotion made her sensible of the occupation. Her abstraction was complete as, sitting down to arrange her hair, she allowed her bright chestnut tresses to fall loose over her shoulders, while, heedless of the toilet glass in front, she gazed on the mirror within her breast. What was the image reflected there?

A low tap called her to the door, and a flutter seized her heart, as she admitted her stepmother.

"I have brought you this," Mrs. Rivers said, presenting Ralph's letter.

Letty trembled, but as she gathered the tenor of the letter, the colour rushed back to her cheek in deeper hue.

"I am glad they consider this due to me," she said, in a low voice, without look-

ing up. And her long eyelashes veiled her in mystery.

"You are glad, because it shows your wish was not unreasonable?" answered Mrs. Rivers.

"Partly on that account."

"I hope you are not governed by any resentment—any false pride: shall I say, malice, Letty? It is by your father's wish I say it, and urge you to renounce such feelings if you have yielded to them. And I say it also from my own heart, which has tasted such bitterness itself, and teaches me how hard it is to know whereof we are made."

"Alas! almost impossible!" sighed Letty.

"But you know where to seek for light, and how freely it is there given," said her stepmother.

Again Letty looked down, which Mrs. Rivers might have deemed an acknowledgment that she had not looked *up*, but she missed the sign.

"We must remember that others are like ourselves," the matron continued: "under

the same blindness, and, perhaps, without our knowledge of the power of grace. Then we shall see the grievance in this business isn't wholly ours."

"Not wholly ours!" echoed Letty, starting.

"Surely not! We can't think but this proud Mr. Granby must be provoked at his nephew marrying the daughter of one of his tenants; and if he had kept his anger within bounds, we could not complain. Let us be just, Letty."

"You naturally don't see my cause in the same light as myself," rejoined Letty. "How can you? how were it possible? when you don't know the facts, except as they are known to everyone."

"I know you have suffered, but now your oppressor repents and offers peace. You are to be the wife of his heir, and your husband's kindred will be yours. Meet them with charity, which hopeth all things, and forgiveth all things."

Uttering these words, Mrs. Rivers pressed

her lips on Letty's, and left the room, glad she had made her such a concession, since without committing her to any responsibility, it exercised her affection, and showed Letty that this existed.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DAIRY.

AFTER an uneasy night, Letty was again at her toilet, but now not without recollecting who were to be her visitors to-day, and, consequently, with an interest in her task. Her eye saw in the glass its own image, now beaming, now dancing; it noted her arched eyebrow, her sunny forehead, her blooming cheek in morning's freshness, and her small chiselled mouth. All was very fair, and over all spread an expression of sweetness, the odour of this flower.

Her review was interrupted by a visit from Alice.

"Not dressed yet?" Alice cried, with an embrace. "I was half afraid you had gone down."

"And what if I had?" answered Letty, droopingly.

"Well, I want first to make a pact with you."

"For what object?"

"Promise to be amiable about it!"

"I promise and vow. Can I say anything stronger—or weaker? Promises being made to be broken, and vows to be abjured."

Alice replied to this speech by another embrace, for she saw tears in Letty's eyes.

"I will have no promise," she said, "for I need none from my Letty, who is always too eager to be kind. And I know my request is granted."

"It must be something very weighty to need so much preface," rejoined Letty, trying to smile.

"Well, I wish to learn all about the dairy. We didn't see it last night, you know. And I want you to take me there now, and get Mary Elizabeth to show me how to make butter and Devonshire cream."

"I am afraid we are too late this morning. It is just seven o'clock, and I daresay Mary Elizabeth began at six. But, if not, you shall have a lesson, and the art is soon learnt."

They went down to the dairy. Early as was the hour, the May sun so warmed the air that, in spite of their light dresses, they found it only pleasantly cool. And the aspect of the dairy was as pleasant as its temperature. The whitewashed walls, the ceiling without a speck, the clean cement floor, the two lines of spotless stools down the middle of the room, with the bright tin bowls, filled with milk, standing on them, formed a perfect picture, — particularly if this were made to include the two girls themselves, and the buxom Mary Elizabeth. Mary Elizabeth they found at her post, in that precise stage of the process which Letty anticipated, the butter being all but made. She could only salute them with a nod and smile, for voice she had none, the exertion of the turning-tub claiming all her

breath. Down in Devon the butter is made by the hand, the cream, previously clotted, being with this turned rapidly over in a tub; and Mary Elizabeth's hand moved with the swiftness of a machine. The two girls stood and watched, till Letty felt her own wrist and chest ache in sympathy.

"I am so glad it is done," Letty cried, as Mary Elizabeth paused and drew breath. "Now Miss Mead and I will wash and beat it, and you can go and see about the breakfast."

"Thankee, Miss Letty, but I'll need to clot the cream first for this afternoon," replied the handmaid.

"We two can manage that," answered Letty. "I want to teach Miss Mead how to do it."

"La! Miss Letty, thee'd let the bowl fall afore you got a yard with it. And you can't pick up spilt milk, you know. I see our big Charlotte drop the bowl once, at the old house, and the rampage it put she in 'se never forget."

"But I pledge myself, if there is an accident, not to show any temper."

"Thou!" laughed Mary Elizabeth, "I expect not! I don't know as I ever see thee in a temper—leastways, nothin' to speak of."

"That's right—don't mention it," cried Alice, "or I shall think her as bad as Charlotte."

"Nay, nay!" returned the dairymaid. "You's need go a good way for temper to find the match of Charlotte, Miss Alley. And," she added, stretching her sympathies to an unbounded length, "I pity the man who has she, that's all. Now I'll carry in the bowl for 'ee, Miss Letty."

"We shall carry it for ourselves, thank you," returned Letty. "You take the handle on that side, Alice, and I'll take this one. We are to go through that door into the kitchen, and put the bowl on the stove, for the cream to scald. Now, lift!"

"And away!" smiled Alice, in high spirits.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Mary Elizabeth, as they bore off the bowl of cream. "It's as good as a play—only I never seed one; but you's sweep off with it like two queens."

The bowl reached its destination in safety, and Letty admonished Alice that they must watch the process, so as to lift off the cream just before it should bubble. This feat they successfully achieved, and soon the bowl stood again in the dairy, where, placed apart from the standing milk, it was to pass through the stage of cooling. It then became the delicious paste known as "Devonshire cream."

"And that is what Mary Elizabeth has just turned into butter, which we are to finish off," said Letty, in continuation of her information to Alice. "Now, are you ready to wash it and beat it?"

"Yes, and to eat it," answered the blithe Alice.

"Maybe thee'd like a little sugar over it, Miss Alley?" said Mary Elizabeth, with

the freedom of old acquaintance. And she disappeared before Alice could reply.

"Salt, salt!" cried Letty, with a dubious smile. And her voice sank. "I can only use salt."

There was a heap close by, and she threw some of it in a trough of water, and then immersed the butter.

Next began the process of washing, and now Letty's hand moved with the dairy-maid's nimbleness, but with a grace all her own, seeming to hover over the butter, rather than skim it, but deftly removing from it every speck. The task of beating was executed with the same facility—and the same charm. Now kneading out the butter like dough, then beating it together, and finally turning it in a roll, Letty brought it to perfection—and herself looked perfection, as she turned to Alice.

There was a glimmer in Alice's eyes.

"I am afraid I shall lose you," she said, mournfully; "I never so realised this probability as now."

"And why now?" asked Letty, in accents akin to her own.

"Because I see our future must place us in different spheres. Not that I regret this in itself. Who can look at you, growing every day more lovely,—it is true, dear Letty, and I could almost say you grow more lovable! Who can see this, and not feel you would adorn a high station—the station to which you are now called!"

The words seemed to throw Letty in a reverie.

"I shall remain in the social position I hold now," Alice went on—"a position the happiest for me; I wish for no better—only I see it must divide me from you."

"Never!" cried Letty, suddenly collecting herself, and throwing her arm round Alice.

Alice could not resume the theme, for at this moment Mary Elizabeth came back to announce breakfast.

CHAPTER XXX.

AN INTRUDER.

THE breakfast was spread in the parlour, where Mrs. Rivers welcomed the two girls, and the circle was presently completed by the entrance of the master of the house. The presence of the girls cheered both him and his wife, and both also were amused by Alice's account of the performances in the dairy, which she turned into a pastoral apotheosis of Letty. All felt the same inclination to exalt Letty, remembering she would this morning receive the submission of Mr. Granby, when her hand would be sought again by the husband from whom she had been divorced, and she would take a position among the magnates of the

county. No wonder that such prospects made her father regard her with pride, and brought her softened stepmother to see she was very charming, while her admiring friend deemed her faultless. Letty bore it all very gravely, which, in her present position, they thought natural, so that they felt no surprise when, directly they finished breakfast, she slipped out of the room.

Now alone, unseen, shut up by herself, she could loose her suppressed feelings—not in tears, but by throwing herself into them, indulging and fostering, and even goading them. All the passion of her woman heart, all its fire, all its wounded sensibility and rankling griefs, so vehement, yet so tender withal—these blended with the memories which called them into action. She traced her engagement to Ralph through all its stages, recalling his first homage, his honeyed vows, his earnest protestations, ending in an invalid marriage and a public divorce! Oh, shame! scandal! sin! crime against nature and Heaven! To leave her

there, at the very altar! If it had been with the purpose he pretended, would he not have written to her on the instant? How had she looked for that letter, thinking it would, it must come! She had counted the minutes through night, dragged in expectation through the day—ah! night after night, and day on day, and there came no letter. Not a word, not a breath, no sign, no remembrance, all obliterated! She was left to be arraigned in a court of justice, and there to be condemned and cast away.

But the boy remembered her beauty. Herself, her noble father, and her honest station, all pertaining to her, he still despised, but she exercised a power in her attractions. So he brought his uncle to sanction their union. How she had been talked over in this negotiation, with what jibes, what contumely! And at last, there had come a reluctant consent—nay, the great Mr. Granby would bend himself to express this in person. And if he could be persuaded to do this now, after so much

fury, and such cruel and vindictive opposition, why not before? Surely she needed to be told why!

A loud peal of the bell broke up her reverie, and for an instant she stood transfixed. Then she clasped her hands, she pressed them on her bosom, she raised them despairingly to Heaven. Her whole frame trembled. By a great effort, seeming to call up her very soul, she rolled back this tide of emotion. She became calm: her face came out serene, like the blue sky after thunder clouds. So she went out on the stairs, where she met her stepmother.

"I was coming for you," said Mrs. Rivers: "*they are here.*"

"And is papa with them?" said Letty, in a composed voice.

"Yes."

"And Alice?"

"She is there, too, as you desired. But, most unseasonably, Mr. Simmer has come, and is pressing to speak to your father."

"May I see him?" asked Letty, eagerly.

"Can you wish it, while *they* are waiting for you?" replied Mrs. Rivers, in surprise.

"Most particularly I wish it. Let us go to him, mother."

The good matron could no longer object, and they entered the back room, where the lawyer, impatient for Mr. Rivers's appearance, was pacing the floor. Their entry brought him to a stand, and he formally paid his respects, showing great deference to Letty.

"I hear Mr. Rivers is seriously engaged," he said. "I am sorry it should happen so, but my business is of such a nature that I really must see him."

"Can you wait a little?" answered Mrs. Rivers. "Mr. Granby is here, and—"

Mr. Simmer here broke in.

"Mr. Granby here! For what purpose? You can't be listening to any terms from him?"

Mrs. Rivers shrank back, and glanced bewilderingly at Letty.

"Pardon me, if I seem to take a liberty,"

said Mr. Simmer to Letty, with his former air of deference, "but I must ask what all this means."

"My mother will tell you," answered Letty, laying her hand on Mrs. Rivers's arm.

The appeal took effect, and Mrs. Rivers stated the object of Mr. Granby's visit, and the presence of Ralph.

"To such an overture I can raise no objection," said the lawyer. "But allow me to advise you to consider it very seriously, Miss Rivers, before you decide."

"I have thoroughly considered it."

"And you have made up your mind?"

Letty bent her head.

"I am about to make a proposition which I am afraid you will deem presumptuous," pursued Mr. Simmer, "but I have come here on a special errand, which may be interfered with, by your interview with Mr. Granby ; so this interview I must prevent, unless you will permit me to be present."

"Your presence will be an encouragement

to me," answered Letty, with the strange composure she had maintained from the first.

Mr. Simmer bent low.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DESTINY.

LETTY's appearance in the parlour, occupied by her father and his visitors, did not excite a greater sensation than the entry of the unexpected Mr. Simmer. But Ralph saw only Letty, and stepping forward, he took her hand. She allowed him to retain it an instant, but then drew it away, and, without raising her eyes, seated herself between Alice and her father. All noticed the incident, and all felt chilled. But Ralph instantly spoke up.

"You know why we are here to-day, Letty," he said, in a tone as manly as gentle, "and I am glad to see here two friends in your confidence, because they will wit-

ness we come to offer reparation for the wrongs brought upon you by my imprudence."

"Wrongs, permit me to say, for which no one is more deeply grieved than myself," said Mr. Granby, in his grandest manner, "and which you should never have suffered, if I had known as much as I do now."

Here a slight cough turned everybody's eye on Mr. Simmer, who, however, looked quite unconcerned.

"I can't doubt but this meeting will heal all breaches, and throw a veil over the past," resumed Mr. Granby, with less pompousness. "It seems to be expected of me to express this sentiment—"

"By whom, sir?" cried Letty.

This sudden interruption, joined to Letty's eager tone and manner, confounded Mr. Granby.

"I beg pardon," he stammered, "I don't exactly understand."

"I ask by whom it was expected you should say what you have?" rejoined Letty.

"By me," cried Ralph. Letty sank back in her chair. "I shall not repeat the reasons I urged for this step," pursued Ralph, "because they refer to events too painful, and which I wish could be forgotten. But my uncle acknowledged their weight. He saw the step was due to sufferings brought on you by me, and due to my affection for you."

As he spoke, Letty raised her eyes to his, and he met her gaze.

"That affection which I call Heaven to witness!" he exclaimed solemnly.

"For the first time?" said Letty, in a tone low as a whisper, but which reached every ear.

"Not for the first time, dear Letty!" said Ralph, with faltering voice.

"At least, let it be the last," cried Letty, rising and standing erect.

Her father threw his arm round her.

"Letty, my child, hush!" he said, softly. "Sit down. Let us decide this grave question calmly, and without bitterness—with-

out even just resentment. It is your own future life you are determining. I must leave it in your hands."

"Be admonished," urged another low voice, which Letty recognised as her step-mother's. "Remember whose lips they were that commanded—'if thy brother say I repent, thou shalt forgive him.'"

"I forgive!" faltered Letty.

"Do I hear you right, Letty?" cried Ralph, eagerly; "you forgive! you retract the words you just uttered? You don't reject—don't spurn, my vows?"

"What can I answer you, Ralph Granby?" cried Letty, in vehement accents. "Shall I clasp my hand round your arm, and offer to go out with you in the world, and share your fortune for good or for ill? Sir, I have done this! And did not your uncle here, say, it was done for your money? I was your wife; newly wedded—wedded before Heaven—yes, you called Heaven to witness then, as now, and how did you respond to me? You shook off my clasp. In

that moment of my devotedness—there, in the very church, you left me without a word, without one word. And to what did you leave me? Oh! I dare not speak of it! Am I to expose myself to this again—again offer to share your destiny—again be cast off, deserted and divorced? No! no!”

And she rushed from the room.

Strange to say, Ralph was rather encouraged than daunted by this movement, and this passionate language, and he sprang up to speak to her outside. But he was stopped by Mr. Simmer.

“One instant,” cried the lawyer. “Up to this moment I have abstained from interfering, but it seems to me I am now called upon to do so, because what I have to say may exercise some influence on the event. Are you—is anyone here aware that the young lady who has just gone out, is the grand-daughter of Letty Barnard?”

“Of course, I am fully aware of it,” observed Mr. Rivers.

“I know nothing about Letty Barnard,” cried Ralph.

"I am glad to hear you say so," replied the lawyer. "Mr. Granby will not pretend to such ignorance."

The Squire made no answer.

"Because," cried Mr. Simmer, "he knows the grand-daughter of Letty Barnard is the owner of Granby Hall."

This announcement fell on the auditors like a thunderclap.

"We have no further business here," cried Ralph to his uncle. And he at once understood the mystery of Mr. Granby's generous interest about Letty.

"I simply wish to state an opinion," answered the Squire, rallying his best manner. "The question of right to the Granby estate, if it is to be disputed, must be decided by law. I hold possession, and this I will spend the whole property to maintain. At the same time, if a marriage could be arranged——"

"You would be disposed to make a compromise?" suggested Mr. Simmer, as the Squire stopped.

Mr. Granby glanced at Mr. Rivers.

"There is nothing I desire more than the marriage," said the farmer, in answer to this interrogation. "I wish for it, apart from questions of property. But it is for my daughter to make her own choice."

"This right she may certainly claim," observed Mr. Simmer. "As regards her right to the Granby property, it needs but to be stated in a court of law to be established."

"I can't enter into an argument on that point," cried Mr. Granby. "But, without reference to it, I am willing to charge the Granby estate with a marriage settlement on my nephew and the lady jointly. This is what I intended to do from the first, and I am ready further to engage the estate shall pass absolutely to them at my death."

Here Ralph again interposed.

"If the estate is not your own, you have no power to effect such an arrangement," he said; "if it is indubitably yours, you prejudice your cause by proposing it. In neither

case can I allow the issue to be made to hinge on me."

So much obstruction daunted Mr. Granby. "Enough!" he said, rising, "this matter must be decided—in chancery!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

AFTER.

LETTY had but just power to pass from the room. As soon as she reached the passage, her feet refused to carry her further, and she was obliged to stop. A movement within—Ralph starting in pursuit—urged her on, and trembling steps took her to the stairs. But here she leant against the banister, unable to proceed.

She had fulfilled her purpose—the purpose conceived when it seemed a wild dream, and when she could not herself imagine the opportunity would arise. Yet the dream was more than realised, and she had gone through it, and persevered to the end. She

who had been deserted at her bridal, calumniated, divorced, made a public scandal, and branded with a perpetual stigma, had enjoyed this triumph. The position she was thought unworthy to fill she had refused, repaying scorn with disdain, and contumely with contempt. Yes, she had done this! It was over—past and gone! And she stood there breathless with the excitement, exhausted with the tempest of feeling and its mad impulses, and knowing she had said and done what was irrevocable.⁹ Like one who had been drunk and was now sobered, one who had been blind and whose eyes now cast their scales, one who had been in a delirium, and now awoke to consciousness, she recoiled from her own act and deed. She became as the suicide writhing in the stream, and too late realizing the guilt of her plunge. The whirl in her brain, the fever in her veins, the fire in her memory, all blending together, threatened, then and there, to destroy her. Why had she given herself over to this infatuation? why had

she excluded every other thought? why had she never allowed herself to pause, but with deliberate purpose, blindly and madly, rushed on fate?

For now she knew how she still loved Ralph—with her whole heart and her whole soul, so that he was dearer to her and nearer than home or kindred—dearer and nearer than all the world beside. This love had lain in her breast till, working deeper and deeper, it became ingrained there. And in her frenzy she stifled its voice. She turned away her ear; she scorned and spurned Ralph himself. Alas! too late came these reflections now. She had embraced her destiny!

But Ralph would not take her refusal. He would follow her from the room—come to her *there*, where she was alone, and where she could surrender herself on his breast. She was his wife! That was the answer she had made to Harry Clayton, when he urged her to become his. Whatever the law decreed, in the sight of heaven she

was, by solemn and irreversible vows, married to Ralph. In her own mind she could not, would not be divorced! And Ralph, loving her as he did, must cherish the same feeling. She held her breath to catch his step, remembering now how often he had borne with her waywardness, and by his loving words, and his admiration—ah! almost adoration, won her submission. Now she asked for no persuasions, no admiring looks—only for his appearance. Why did he not come? why did he keep her in this suspense? In vain she strained her ears; she heard only the beating of her own heart.

Should she go back to the room? The impulse was so strong that she overcame it only by darting into the garden. As she was passing down the walk, with her back towards the house, Ralph and his uncle came out, and she was just seen by Ralph.

The glimpse showed him her luxuriant tresses, her wavy form, and her queenly grace, and imaged to his memory her soft eyes and blooming cheek—all her dreamlike

beauty. And he looked upon this for the last time! he, to whom it had all been given! No! he must see her once more—for one moment! He no longer thought of appealing from her decision, for he felt that appearances now linked the renewal of his suit with the sordid motive ascribed to it by Mr. Simmer, and which his uncle had tacitly admitted. But he could not again go without bidding her farewell. So he left Mr. Granby at the gate, and turned after Letty.

There was a field between the garden and the road, and Mr. Granby walked on, but with a loitering step, having a suspicion of Ralph's object, and thinking that if it prospered, he might yet have to go back to the house. But in this he was presently undeceived, for before he reached the road, Ralph reappeared, and the Squire saw by his face that Letty was lost. In fact, Ralph searched the garden in vain; Letty had re-entered the house, and taken refuge in her own room.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

PHILOSOPHY AND LOVE.

THE stir arising from the departure of Ralph and Mr. Granby enabled Alice to glide unobserved from the room. Thus left alone with Mr. and Mrs. Rivers, Mr. Simmer explained in detail how he discovered Letty's right to the Granby estate, while pursuing his researches in behalf of Harry Clayton. Investigation proved that there was a female offshoot of the Granbys nearer than either Harry or the Squire, and represented by one Humphrey Barnard. With great difficulty proof was obtained of Humphrey's death, unmarried ; and Mr. Simmer was rejoicing in this success, when he learnt from a further search that Humphrey's right devolved

on a sister, and, continuing his inquiries, he ultimately ascertained that this lady was Letty's grandmother.

After the explanation, the lawyer and his two auditors held a council, and it was decided that legal steps should be taken to establish Letty's claim, though nothing should be said to herself on the subject, except that she would, as the representative of her grandmother, eventually inherit a fortune. Mrs. Rivers engaged for the secrecy of Alice, and now went in quest of her, to prevent communication with Letty, and she managed so well that the two girls were hardly alone together until, in the afternoon, the doctor arrived to take Alice home.

It was a grief to the doctor to hear Letty had rejected Ralph, particularly when Mr. Rivers divulged her claim to the Granby estate, but he agreed it was better not to renew the match when she clearly would not contract it from affection—for who could now form any other conclusion? Indeed, the apothecary, coupling her conduct with

that of Alice, began to think girls were actuated in these affairs solely by caprice. He wickedly conceived a prejudice against all sorts and conditions of girls, particularly against Letty, and more particularly against Alice. Alice had really no ground of quarrel with the Pastor, yet she cast him off, and the doctor bit his lip when he asked himself wherefore. It seemed to be done in sheer wilfulness—for the apothecary knew nothing of the sensitive instincts, the refined inspirations, and the mysterious feelings of a woman's heart—mysterious beyond her own fathoming, and often moving her without her own consciousness. That Alice would now be brought to love Jack he thought natural. With his ancient lineage and his little freehold, Jack already seemed a man of mark, and he had rendered her such a service as must indelibly impress her imagination. The doctor answered Jack's offer by telling him this—for seeing how he stood before the world, and how he was respected, and recognising his claim on

Alice, he saw no objection in the offer itself. But he urged Jack not to press it at this moment, when Alice might be swayed rather by gratitude than affection, and afterwards, as in the case of the Pastor, regret her precipitation. So they arranged that Jack should keep out of the way for a time, and the apothecary playfully determined to tell Alice he had gone to Canada, in support of which statement Jack gave that name to his freehold, and had it painted in large letters on the gate.

Alice, as they now rode along, soon discovered her father was in a brown study.

"How dull you are to-day, papa," she said. "You have been too much by yourself, and I mustn't go away for so long again. Now tell me who has been to see you since I left."

"You know the roll," answered Mr. Mead, curtly: "only the usual set."

"I suppose not. But you can tell me what they said."

It happened that all had talked of the

fire, and Alice's rescue by Jack, and the doctor felt a satisfaction in remembering Jack had been highly spoken of. But it was not good policy to tell Alice this.

"What *should* they say?" he replied, with the same surliness. "There has been only one event for Chesney to speak of lately."

"Of course, everybody is full of the fire. But to speak of the fire was to speak about me and my rescue from it. Didn't they all praise John Reeve?"

"You don't expect me to recollect their gossip."

"Can you call praise of John Reeve gossip?" cried Alice, sternly. "I wonder at you, papa." The apothecary shrank up. "Do you forget what he did? But I know how it is. You are vexed with Letty, and avenge it on me; and I believe at this moment you could snap any girl's head off."

"I should be puzzled to know where to snap," said the doctor, with rallying sarcasm; "for when I seemed to have the head, I should only be dragging away a lot

of false hair. Girls' heads are sham outside, and hollow within. I can only compare them to fossilised univalves."

"Why, don't you call us unicorns," retorted Alice, putting on her offended air. "And of course men are the lions. That explains the notion about the lion and the unicorn fighting for the crown."

"You may fight for the crown, but you will never get it."

"We have got it," cried Alice, exultingly. "Oh, papa! how could you make such a miss?" And she recovered her good-humour, while the sound of her old blithe laugh so charmed the apothecary that he laughed too.

Alice longed to pursue the subject of Jack, but shrank from again bringing it up when it had been so slighted by her father. So she fell back in her seat, with a sigh. This, following so close on her laugh, opened the doctor's eyes.

"Talking of John Reeve," he said, "you didn't bid him good-bye before he went off."

"I daresay he won't be away very long, and hasn't gone very far," replied Alice, with assumed carelessness.

"In the present day the distance is nothing, but I believe he intended to stay there altogether."

"Stay where?" cried Alice, now eagerly.

"At Canada," answered the mischievous doctor.

Alice jumped in her seat.

"You are not in earnest!" she exclaimed, fixing on her father eyes brimming with tears. "Dear papa, say you are only jesting!"

The doctor stood firm.

"He has gone!" cried Alice. "Jack, who saved my life—who loved me—loved me!"

And now her tears flowed unrestrained.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SHOOTING THE ORCHARD.

JACK REEVE, from the moment of his explanation with the doctor, had become a new man, or, rather he recovered his old disposition in a new station. He found life was not so dreary as he thought; that it is better to bear its sad experiences, keeping up through all, and we shall come to some amelioration, perhaps reward at last. So he felt now his former thankfulness without his former discontent. More than this; he was grateful, cheerful, and hopeful!

In this spirit he threw himself into his little farm, and, as a start, based his establishment on the principle that one fed labourer is worth two starvelings, not only doing



twice the work, but also being more interested for his master, so that under the temptation of opportunity, he will both keep his hands from picking and stealing, and his task from lagging. Wherefore, Jack raised the scale of wages from nine shillings a week to thirteen, in addition to the appurtenances; and therewith hired Balders and Jem Stone. The staff was completed by the two eldest of Jem's thirteen, Jem the Second being appointed cowboy and carter, and the Second Polly, housekeeper, housemaid, cook, and domestic in general.

This Utopian Canada was now in full operation. Everybody knew his work, and everybody did it, not grudgingly, but with hand and mind equally willing, and, after a few weeks, the freehold presented a new aspect; the arable was ploughed and sown; the meadow put forth its promise; and buds showed themselves in the orchard. Then it occurred to Jack that, as the place had been unoccupied during the winter, the trees had not been shot at; a ceremony

prescribed by Devonshire custom, and which is usually enacted on old Twelfth Night, but sometimes deferred till the appearance of bud. Accordingly Jack determined the shooting should take place that evening.

"How will you like to stop and shoot the orchard, lads?" he said, as Balders and Jem Stone were leaving work. "The trees are all in bud, and I'm going at it to-night."

"It won't dew much good now, I doubt," answered Balders.

"Better late than never," rejoined Jack, "though, as for that, it won't matter if it isn't done at all."

"You'd get a very bad bearin', then, master," observed Jem Stone.

"I expect it won't come to a partic'lar good one, anyways," remarked the dismal Balders. "The shootin' baint much account after old twelf-night, and I never knew a bearin' without shootin'."

"And I never knew trees look better for a bearing than these do," said Jack.

"Looks is nothin', master," returned Bal-

ders. "Why, thee may have a blight come any day, and just make a clean sweep on 'em." And he turned for corroboration to Jem Stone. But Jem, though generally partial to evil prophecies, leaned to the view of his master, not only from an intuition as to which side his bread was buttered, but because he verily believed Jack to be infallible.

"Looks counts for summat, too," he said, "and I wouldn't be afeard of blight, if they'd done the shootin' twelf-night. But I don't know how it 'ull be with shootin' now."

"There you're about right, lad," observed Jack. "Say you don't know, and you'll never be far out. As for what will happen next autumn, or next week, or this very day, we know about as much as a tom cat."

Here Jem Stone dubiously shook his head, remembering Bet Kedge's cats. "Looks are deceitful," Jack continued; "and shooting's no more use than snorting; only it calls for a mug o' cider."

This reason exorcised all objection from

the two labourers, winning from Balders a "caw" of approval, and from Jem Stone a broad grin.

Both the younger Jem and Polly heard of the project with the same satisfaction. Polly, indeed, was shut out by her sex from any active part in the ceremony, and could only show zeal in drawing the cider; for young Jem wrested from her the honour of bearing the jug to the orchard—not, if the truth must be told, till after a sharp scuffle, in which both cider and jug had a narrow escape. Young Jem aspired also to carry off the gun and ammunition, but his father pushed him aside; whence he had to content himself with the functions of butler and cupbearer. This appeared to him a very arbitrary arrangement, the gun being ordinarily intrusted to him for the purpose of frightening birds, and thus appearing to be his proper personalty; so he considered all the shooting ought rightfully to be done by himself. But custom vests this duty in the owner of the trees, and Jack, gun in

hand, now placed himself in front of the party in the centre of the orchard, where, under his leading, they all chorussed the charm—

“Here’s to thee, old apple tree!
May thee blow, and may thee bare
Apples enough for all to share:
Hats’ full, bags’ full, bushels brim,
Grow upon thee, branch and limb!”

This good wish was washed down with cider, passed all round, and followed by a unanimous “hip, hip, hip, hurrah!” Then Jack fired.

“Now we’ll give ’em a touch at the four corners,” observed Jack, “and one shot for lost time, like the interest at the savings’ bank, when you’ve got any money in it.”

The idea of a labourer being able, like a gentleman’s servant, to lodge money in a savings’ bank, struck his hearers as a most felicitous stroke of satire, Balders going off into a succession of “caws,” and the two Jems bursting into roars.

“Howsomever,” said the elder Jem, after

of false hair. Girls' heads are sham outside, and hollow within. I can only compare them to fossilised univalves."

"Why, don't you call us unicorns," retorted Alice, putting on her offended air. "And of course men are the lions. That explains the notion about the lion and the unicorn fighting for the crown."

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don't know how. They don't see it is fellowship, as you say, that is wanted."

"Ah, you're right there, Doctor. There's too much stand-off, even when they give you flannel and blankets—which I was never offered myself, and never wanted. And how different they go on in a town—the very same gentry. Why, I saw a working man standing on a platform giving it to them right and left. Up jumped Sir Charles Raven, and I thought, now he'll lash you, lad. But not a bit of it! Sir Charles turned his back on all his own sort, and went in for this very chap, saying he was a working-man; and a working-man was this and that, till it seemed to me the working-man was the top o' the tree. Now why shouldn't Sir Charles be the same for the labouring man born and bred on his own estate? He overdoes it with the working-man, till the working-man makes a fool of himself, and he leaves the labouring man on his own land, to go down lower and lower, so that I think he'll be down with the cattle at last."

"He is already down at residuum," observed the doctor. "I shall bring Sir Charles here some day to see how you manage. But that reminds me, I want to speak to Balders, and he is going along the road so slow, I see I can overtake him. I shall follow you in directly, and take a cup of tea with you, if we can have it quick."

"You shall have it in no time," answered Jack, with unbounded reliance on Polly.

But Polly required to be told his wishes, and Jack, with all his good intentions, no sooner entered the house than he forgot both Polly and the tea, and even the doctor himself; for his first glance showed him Alice, sitting in the parlour. She was looking the other way, and he asked his conscience whether, by his pact with the doctor, he was not bound to slip out again, thereby avoiding a meeting. But it was the doctor who brought Alice there, and knowing she was there, sent him in, and, therefore, he must intend them to meet—only it might be done in forgetfulness.

This last consideration decided Jack to back out of the house, only the movement made such a noise, Alice looked round.

"Can that be you, John?" she cried, with an air of surprise, which, though only assumed, was to a blooming cheek and sparkling eye very becoming. "Why somebody told me you had gone to Canada, and I thought you must be."

"I can't say but it might seem true," answered Jack, putting on a bold face, and a bright one also.

"You disappeared like — I don't know what."

"Like a dandelion's head when you blow it off in seed time," observed Jack: "it's nowhere."

Alice laughed.

"But your head was not blown off," she said.

"Still I've felt as if I was nowhere." Here Jack, who had been standing in the doorway, advanced into the room. "But I know where I am now."

"And a very pretty place it is, I think," said Alice, with a glance round.

"It isn't the place, it's the person who's in the place. You don't care for an empty purse, but put a bit of gold in it!—and that is what I see here, Alley."

And Jack audaciously sat down by her side.

"I thought you were to come to see me seven days in the week?" answered the bit of gold.

"That was the agreement."

"And you haven't come once!"

"Didn't I say within so many miles?" cried Jack, with sudden radiation. "Now I ask you, didn't I, Alley?"

"You said seven miles."

"Ten, Alley!—I said ten!"

"And Cockington is only six and a half!" answered Alice.

"But how far is Canada?—we are in Canada now."

Jack impressed this piece of information on Alice through the medium of her lips, a

proceeding from which she had hardly recovered, when they were joined by her father.

"What do you think, papa?" she cried, "Jack wants me to believe—"

"Canada is paradise," exclaimed the apothecary. "You may as well believe that, as believe matrimony is all bliss. But where is the tea, Jack?"

"You shall have it in a twinkling."

"Ah, Jack! you never thought of it," returned the doctor. "You have been shooting the orchard again, and this time you have knocked down the apple-blossoms."

But soon the table was spread, according to the quaint Devonshire custom, with snow-white tablecloth, and Polly laid out tea, to be dispensed by her future mistress.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE STOLEN LETTER.

RALPH, apart from his sorrow, felt so much mortification in his rejection by Letty, that he wished to hide his head in a distant country. That the world should know he had been divorced from Letty, and then learn that she was the rightful heir of the Granbys, and refused to renew the marriage, seemed, in his despondent mood, to expose him to universal derision. For two or three days he secluded himself at the Hall, in utter dejection. The qualities he had acquired from self-discipline disappeared, leaving him subject to his early vacillation, and his resolutions changed with every moment. His mind continually recurred to Letty herself, and whenever he recalled

his situation, he found himself dreaming of her beauty, her grace, her sweet voice, and pretty ways. If he had but Letty—if he could even have looked forward to winning her at a future time—he would have reconciled himself to everything else. But he recognised this as hopeless. Letty had spoken with a decision that he now accepted as final. And, even if it were not so, with what face could he, who was without fortune or prospect, appeal for her pity, when she, cast off in his prosperity, was now to be vested with the inheritance he had lost? How cruel he thought her, and vindictive, and what angry feelings blended with his love, needs not to say! But he came to judge her more kindly, and to acknowledge she had undergone treatment that afforded her justification.

Then he began to brace himself for the efforts required by his altered fortune. Without consulting his uncle, he wrote to Sir Charles Raven, announcing what had taken place, and soliciting his influence to

obtain him an appointment abroad. To this letter he promptly received the following reply :—

“Ravenwood, May 10, 1867.

“DEAR RALPH,

“UNDER the circumstances you mention (and which, as you request, I shall keep strictly secret), I concur with you that your best course is to go out of the country, and I went directly to the India Office to see what could be done. I am happy to be able to offer you a nomination to the India Civil Service. You will have to pass an examination, but it is only what you are well up to, with the exception of Hindostanee, which they tell me you can, with your present acquirements, learn in six months. I enclose the card of the teacher they recommend. Let me see you soon, and, meanwhile, accept my sincere sympathy.

“Your old friend,

“CHARLES RAVEN.”

Ralph was now relieved of one cause of

anxiety ; he had secured an honourable means of livelihood, and, in accepting this, he should place the breadth of the world between himself and his circle of acquaintance. Now, feeling independent, he went to announce his success to his uncle.

Mr. Granby occupied his usual post in the library, and before him lay two tomes, which, in a fit of abstraction, he forgot to open. Ralph found him poring over an account in the writing of Bradley. The Squire's chin was lowered, and he listened to Ralph's statement without interruption.

"I quite enter into your feelings," he then said. "If the case stood as you think, perhaps nothing better could be done. Even at the best, it will be disagreeable for people to know this girl has refused you, particularly after what took place before—and, of course, she will tell it to everybody. There, don't interrupt me. You have had your say, and let me have mine." Ralph still attempted to protest against any imputation on Letty, but Mr. Granby only spoke the

louder. "I tell you she wouldn't be a woman if she didn't have her crow over you. But I won't argue the point. Everyone has a right to an opinion, and I simply state mine. However, this is of no relevancy to our business. What I wish you to understand is, that my hold on the Granby estate is stronger than you suppose."

"Is there any doubt of the precedence of the Barnard branch?" asked Ralph.

"No, but there is a doubt about Letty Barnard's marriage."

"Can this be established?"

"The marriage can't, at any rate," exclaimed the Squire. "So, you see, there is no need for you to be in such a hurry. Of course it is a time of anxiety, but our lawyers consider we have yet very good footing, and we will fight it out."

"Anyhow, it will do me no harm to learn Hindostanee," replied Ralph, not wishing to harass his uncle at such a crisis, but inwardly determined to adhere to his own plans.

"You may do as you like about that," rejoined Mr. Granby; "the point isn't worth arguing. But I wish, while I am out riding, you would have a search in that desk of Bradley's"—he pointed to a desk on a side-table—"for his vouchers; I am having his accounts audited, and the last vouchers are missing. You can leave them on his statement here, if you find them."

Everything relating to Bradley was odious to Ralph. He remembered the steward as a sort of vampire, who had revenged his own rejection by fastening on him and Letty, and fomenting the troubles which destroyed their happiness. As he sat down to the desk, he recalled the incidents of this vendetta, and an angry flush suffused his face. But Mr. Granby quitted the room without noting his agitation, and Ralph, left to himself, plunged into the desk to get through the task as soon as possible. The bundle of vouchers presented itself within as the first object, and he snatched it up, and was closing the desk, when his eye

lighted on a letter in his own writing. His breath stopped, his hand seemed paralysed ; he almost doubted the evidence of his sight, which, indeed, for an instant went from him, leaving him in darkness. But then all his faculties came back, and he snatched the letter up—*the letter he had addressed to Letty from Paris !*

Again he read those burning words, that passionate appeal, and his vow of eternal fidelity. He examined the postmarks and compared their date with that of the letter. All seemed regular, but this only deepened the mystery. How had the letter been acquired by Bradley ?

For a few moments he was plunged in bewilderment. Then he determined to make every effort to learn the truth. But where was the investigation to begin ? At first he thought of invoking the assistance of the police-sergeant, Appleby, who, as one of his uncle's satellites, was always at his disposal. But the delicacy of his relations with Letty forbade this course. So he

REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER

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remember it if it ever comed," she answered. "I'se knowed she from a baby, though her baint Mrs. Ralph Granby, and never were, if the judge spoke true."

"We will keep to the letter," rejoined Ralph, sternly. "This is it!" and he drew the letter forth. "You see, it bears the Chesney postmark, and was in your hands on the tenth of August."

"And how comed you with it, Muster Ralph Granby?" demanded the post-woman, now adopting a bullying tone. "The letter were stole from here, and 'ee must have got it from the thief."

"How it reached me is not the question. The point you have to clear up, is why it wasn't delivered at its address in the regular way? Now will you tell me all you know about it, or shall I apply to the postmaster general, for an official inquiry?"

"No, no, Muster Ralph! Yer wouldn't go to ruin me, a lone woman, who's knowed you from a boy up! The letter was stole, I give 'ee my word! I just laid it out o' my

hand, and it were gone, and old Bet Kedge, who were standin' by, made me believe it was a trick o' Satan; the Lord keep us from his wiles. And I could swear Bet witched it away, and Ise never abared the sight of she since."

"If I find she stole the letter, I shall acquit you." And Ralph turned to the door.

"And art thee goin' to her now, Muster Ralph?"

"This instant."

"Then, I'll along wi' you, for yer'll never make out what her says. Her's gone all but childish, through not gettin' the reward about the fire, and folk say her witched that poor sinful man, Bradley, and set him on to do it." Here Mrs. Stair followed Ralph out, locking the shop door behind, and exclaiming: "Ay, he were a wolf in sheep's clothing, and such deceive the very elect."

Ralph accepted this character of Bradley, without expressing his assent, and they walked in silence to Bet's hovel, which Mrs.

Stair, no longer fearing her glamour, unceremoniously entered. Bet was sitting on her stool, bent double over her broomstick.

"Ah, Muster Clayton! how be thee?" she cried, espying Ralph. "Well, you's got Missy now, and I hear say yer'll get the Hall, too, and yer'll mind to give I a new cottage; for us can't live on here. The rain and wind come in terrible, and I got twenty year afore me yet, and I must take care o' the dumb animals, or them 'ull die first."

That Bet had fallen into the abyss of second childhood, was but too plain, and Ralph thought it useless to put her under interrogation, but Bet's condition produced no effect on Mary Stair, except to dissipate her apprehensions of sorcery, and she determined to make her avow her guilt.

"What did 'ee get from Luke Bradley for thievin' the letter to Mrs. Ralph Granby?" she demanded, seizing Bet by her shoulders, and giving her a violent shake.

But Bet's memory was a blank.

"Do thee hear what I say?" cried Mary, in a threatening voice.

"Ay, I hear 'ee. Yer say Granby. That 'ud be the old Squire as was, afore Muster Clayton there. I knowed 'un. A hard man on poor folk!"

"The letter!" screamed Mary, "the letter yer stole and gived to Luke Bradley."

A momentary light glimmered in Bet's face.

"Ha, ha! Ise mind now," she laughed out. "The letter young Squire sent to Missy, and I gived to Muster Bradley, and he gived I—let's see, where were us? what's us talkin' about?"

The flicker of intellect had died out.

"Don't trouble her any more," Ralph said to the postwoman. "I see how the letter went, and I acquit you of complicity, though not of carelessness. But this old creature mustn't be left here to perish. Promise me to take her to the workhouse, and I shall make no complaint about the letter."

Mary was too glad to get off on such terms, and Ralph waited to see the arrangement carried out, keeping the two women in view till he saw, from the angle of the road, the door of the union open and the old wretch admitted within.

There was something heroic in this act of charity, under his bitter provocation, and the sense of desolation in his breast. For now he saw the full scope of his fatal conduct at the marriage, now he understood how it exposed Letty to treason on every side, and now he knew that his letter of justification, written in the unmistakable passion of the moment, and breathing its devotedness, had never reached her hands.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HARRY EMBRACES HIS LOT.

HARRY CLAYTON, declined by Letty, and thus disappointed in his love, returned to town very disheartened. He felt sure that Letty had once regarded him with favour, and he ascribed her subsequent preference of Ralph first to ambition, and afterwards to caprice—never considering that he had sought to play fast and loose himself. That she should still hold by vows from which she was freed by law he deemed to be due to sheer obstinacy. He looked upon woman with a great deal of sentiment, but without real appreciation and without sympathy—as if she were less a fellow-being

than a picture, fair to behold, but in substance a rag. Below the picture, underlying its beauty and proportion and grace, he saw but the common canvas of nature—coarse and hard, knowing nothing of gifts of heart and mind, exquisite sensibilities and hidden depths of affection. The attraction he recognised was what he felt to a fine work of art. But Letty brought him to understand a more potent and more absorbing influence.

In London he received a note from Mr. Simmer, requesting him to call at his chambers; and, full of anticipation, he at once set off. As usual, he cooled down in the chill of the outer office, but he did not remain there long, being invited to present himself before Mr. Simmer.

“Well, the Granby property is still in a muddle,” the lawyer said. “But since I saw you I have ascertained one point—there is a nearer claimant than either Mr. Granby or yourself.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Harry, knitting his

brow. He remembered Jack Reeve's prophecy.

"I told you there was a hitch," continued Mr. Simmer. "I found a difficulty in obtaining proof of the death of Humphrey Barnard."

"All the Barnards are dead!" cried Harry, vehemently.

"Humphrey's death I finally traced out."

"I assure you the whole branch is extinct."

"Humphrey died unmarried," resumed Mr. Simmer, quietly, "but he left a sister, who is now represented by a granddaughter"—he suppressed Letty's name—"and this young lady proves to be one of my own clients."

"I hope I am not to be sacrificed to that accident," cried Harry, now enraged.

"By no means. But your claim couldn't stand a moment against hers, only for one fact. We suddenly find a difficulty about Letty Barnard's marriage—that is, it can't be established by proofs, though no moral

doubt exists that a marriage took place, so this may be got over in a court of equity."

"Surely never! The law can't be so unjust."

Mr. Simmer smiled.

"Law baffles prophets, and sends diviners mad," he said, "and what may be the issue I won't pretend to foresee, particularly as a few days will decide. But the new claimant has brought an action for ejectment against Mr. Granby."

"And what of my claim?" said Harry, heatedly.

"I sent for you to explain your position. If Mr. Granby wins this action, he will fight you to the last farthing; and the question is, will you, while he is under apprehension, endeavour to make some conditions with him, resigning your claim on the estate for a consideration, either in a payment down, or an annuity?"

"To that question I answer no!" exclaimed Harry. "I won't sell my birth-right for a mess of pottage. To the Bar-

nard claim—if such a claim there be—I must defer, but with these Byrne-Granbys I will wrestle till a court of law pronounces between us.”

And he arose, and took his departure, so exasperated as hardly to know whither he went. But soon he found himself approaching Northumberland Street. In his dejection he felt the want of sympathy, and his thoughts turned to Lisabee. Gradually he began to weigh Lisabee’s virtues. She was decidedly handsome, she was good-tempered, she brimmed with enthusiasm, and she appreciated his pictures. Money she was not overburdened with, but she had connexions, and, to a professional man, particularly such a talented one as himself, connexions are as good as money. Really he might as well drop his hesitation, and go in for marrying Lisabee. He had hesitated about Letty, and been cut out by Ralph; and, not to commit the same blunder again, he now resolved to tell Lisabee his mind without delay.

He was ushered into the drawing-room, and found it tenanted by Portia. But he sat down, and made himself agreeable, confident that his arrival would be reported to Lisabee, and soon bring her in. Still time passed on, and she made no appearance.

"Where is Lisabee this morning?" he said at length. "But I needn't ask. No doubt she is busy-beeing as usual."

"Ah! all that will be dropped now," replied Portia.

"Dropped! why, pray?"

"I forgot you had been away for a fortnight—that is, two weeks, a cycle in the brief space of human life. What events may be crowded into it! how much of good! how much of ill! how much work by the toiling millions, and of pleasure by the bloated rich!"

"What has all this to do with Lisabee?"

"*Henry Clayton*"—Portia considered the designation of *Harry* a nickname, and, therefore, unworthy of her recognition—

"the world doesn't stand still, though you are out of it for a fortnight, and Lisabee never stands still. She is busy-beeing, as you call it, even now, but it is now all for herself. In short, she is out shopping, in preparation for her marriage."

The announcement struck Harry's breast like a bullet. He sank in a chair by Portia's side.

"This is quite unexpected news," he said, in a forced tone. "Who is the happy man?"

"Oh! that goose Gawkey, of course," exclaimed Portia. "How she could *accept* him I can't conceive. I was so angry, incensed, provoked, and exasperated, that, at the moment, I could have boxed her ears. To take that stick, a creature without brains, or mind, or two ideas, and marry him—doesn't it show the depth to which woman has fallen?"

Harry could only think how he had fallen himself, to be jockeyed by a Gawkey!

"Before I would marry a heap of clothes

with money in the pockets for makeweight," pursued Portia, "I would turn nun—positively I would! What are the aims, objects, pursuits, and aspirations of life—nay, what is life itself, if we are to end in marrying a Gawkey?"

"I certainly can't compliment Lisabee on her taste," ejaculated Harry.

"At best, marriage consigns a women to bondage," continued Portia. "She gives up her birthright, freedom, independence, and self-control, even her home, kindred, and name. Yet all this I could yield to——"

Harry looked up. He remembered that Portia had three hundred a year left to her by an aunt; she was also, equally with Lisabee, dowered with the family connexion. Besides, it would be a smart thing to spite Lisabee; so he interrupted Portia's offer to yield by a faint articulation.

"To what?"

"To a MAN!" exclaimed Portia; "a man I admired, leant upon, looked up to, and respected; who must be a man in mind and

purpose, and in form, too! I may seem to make a high demand, but I know I am worth it, and won't bate a jot."

"I like your mettle," said Harry.

His tone caused Portia to look round, and she seemed rather to like *his* mettle.

It was a fearful leap, but leaps in the dark are the rage of the era, and Harry shut his eyes and jumped.

Would she have him? Well, there were several things to be considered, and——

In short, Portia named the day.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

FAY UNDER ORDERS.

THERE was great elasticity about Ralph, but he had also great sensibility, and the discovery that his letter from Paris never reached Letty, threw him back into his first despair. He had begun to hope that time and his absence might soften Letty, not to the degree of inducing her to seek a reconciliation, but so far as to lead her to think of him with some regret. So tenacious is this bond of love, that even in estrangement, it prompts the aspiration to inspire indulgent memories in its object. And Ralph believed Letty would see in the end that his apparent abandonment of her in the church, error as it proved, was dictated solely by his love.

But this expectation rested on the impression that she had received his letter of justification at the time. When it became clear that the letter had miscarried, consequently that she was left to conclude he actually cast her off in the church, and so rendered himself a party to all that followed, the base light in which he must appear to her dyed his cheek with shame. Now he could account for her apparent sternness, so much at variance with her nature ; now he could understand how she preferred to brave the contumely surrounding a divorced wife, to union with such a betrayer.

But was it too late to vindicate himself? He blushed that he could entertain such a question. Easy was it to make advances when Letty was in comparative poverty, and with her strong claim for redress, justified him in every submission. But it was now Letty who might assume superiority—Letty, whom in a few days the law might vest with what had seemed his birthright. They had exchanged positions, and mean indeed he

should be—lost alike to delicacy and honour, to seek further explanation now.

Such reflections kept revolving in his mind, till they generated callousness, which took away both his sensibility and his energy. He fell into that mood which sometimes seizes the strongest man, when, incurring misfortune on misfortune, and disappointment on disappointment, he sinks in the midst of an effort, losing the power to hope, which is the power to contend. In such moments the mind is more susceptible to influence from without, as if it gave up the helm of its judgment to others; and Ralph now fell under the guidance of his uncle. He took no step to qualify himself for his nomination in the India service, and seemed to forget the past, and to be apathetic about the future. Mr. Granby took him to London, and there Ralph did whatever he desired, but showed interest in nothing. This disposition was not unwelcome to Mr. Granby, who wished to settle him in life in his own way, and considered

this should be done while no doubt appeared of his prospect in the Granby succession. So he opened negotiations with Mrs. Dorrington to secure Fay and Dorrington Manor.

It happened that Mrs. Dorrington had just learnt that Fay's chance of Dorrington Manor was exceedingly small, inasmuch as the owner thereof, after long inclining to Fay, had now, in momentary expectation of death, made a new will. Hence Mrs. Dorrington was doubly eager to respond to the Squire. At the same time she determined that she would no longer mince matters with Fay, but compel her to assist in bringing the affair to a conclusion.

"I want to have a serious talk with you this morning, Fay," she said, as they rose from breakfast; "and I hope it will lead you to make up your royal mind to do something useful."

"What a portentous exhortation, mama," replied Fay, putting her hand to her forehead.

"Now pray don't go in for a headache," returned Mrs. Dorrington, severely, "for what you have to do won't allow of headaches. It needs all your adroitness, and, let me say, requires you to put out all your attractions."

Fay assumed an attitude of resignation.

"I have received private information," resumed her mother, "that your cousin Dorrington is dying"—Fay gave a slight start—"but this event will bring no benefit to you, as he has most shamefully bequeathed Dorrington Manor to some male relative. Now, my income depends on a secret, which may transpire any moment."

"A secret, mama?"

"Well, my fortune was squandered by your father, who, at his death left me destitute, when your grandfather settled upon me eight hundred a year, so long as I should remain a widow. The annuity was to cease if I married again, and within the year I married Mr. Granby."

"Ralph's uncle?"

"We know no other Mr. Granby."

"You amaze me, mama."

"It was a condition of our union that he should settle upon me the same income I forfeited, and this was to be a charge on the Granby estate. A deed to this effect was executed, but I still stipulated that as I was in the first year of widowhood the ceremony should be private. This proved a providential thing, for on our return from the church, a letter was put in my hands, which, supposing it to be for myself, I, without looking at the address, read. The letter was to Mr. Granby from his lawyers, and stated the marriage settlement to be worthless, as they had just discovered the Granby property was not his, there being a more direct heir, named Humphrey Barnard."

"How extraordinary!" ejaculated Fay.

"I instantly wrote to Mr. Granby from my room, enclosing a copy of the letter, and telling him I considered this disclosure nullified the marriage—that I should never live

under his roof, nor bear his name, and that if he either interfered with me, or allowed the marriage to become known, I should find out Humphrey Barnard, and enable him to claim the estate."

"And he left you free!"

"Up to this time, and I have thus retained the Dorrington allowance. Now you know *the secret*. But I have been shown incontestable proof that Humphrey Barnard is dead, which takes away my power over Mr. Granby, and he is not only able, by proclaiming our marriage, to cut off my income, but may any moment deprive me of my liberty."

This intimation unnerved Fay. Her head drooped, and her ears involuntarily closed, dreading to hear more.

"There is but one way out of these difficulties," said her mother, after a pause. "You must marry his nephew."

"How can I marry him without his proposing?" replied Fay, with the fierceness of desperation.

"It must be your business to make him propose."

"What a task you put upon me, mama! I say nothing of its impropriety, nothing of my aversion to the match, but you require me to do what is impossible."

"Fay Dorrington, don't talk to me about the impossible. I told you before that Ralph Granby is in your hands; and in such a case, for a girl with your attractions and your cleverness, to say you can't influence him as you please, is sheer nonsense. As for impropriety, you know that what I ask of you is done by girls every day. I fully expected you would be engaged when you came back from taking him to the railway. I knew he was willing; you were aware he had in a certain way come to an explanation with me"—Mrs. Dorrington thought it well to keep up this impression—"and it only required you to put out your powers to be successful. If I don't mistake, his uncle has written to you to the same purport."

Here Mrs. Dorrington handed Fay a

note, in which she read, with straining eyes, the following lines from Mr. Granby.

"DEAR MISS DORRINGTON,

"By your mama's wish, I write to assure you I share her views about the marriage with my nephew, Ralph; and I think, with her, that it rests entirely with yourself to decide whether we shall all be made happy in this arrangement.

"Believe me,

"Yours sincerely,

"JOHN BYRNE-GRANBY."

"This makes my position still more painful," observed Fay, with crimsoned cheek. "But I will say nothing of my feelings—"

"You have said too much about them," interrupted Mrs. Dorrington; "and I am sick of the subject. So, if you please, you will now think only of how you are to elicit a declaration from Ralph Granby."

"How indeed!" murmured Fay.

"I will tell you, miss," returned her

mother, sternly—"by using your eyes, your smiles, and your tongue. Don't look at me in that way. I won't be stared at. I say you are to marry this man; and if he is too crestfallen to propose to you, you must propose to him. Now go to your room, and when you are sent for, remember what you have to do."

Fay no sooner disappeared than Mrs. Dorrington regretted having been so peremptory, considering that, as the work was to be one of fascination, success depended on Fay putting her whole heart in the matter, and this she could not do under compulsion. But what other influence could be employed? Mrs. Dorrington was pondering this difficulty, when the servant ushered in Isaac Wingfield.

"You are just the person I wished to see," said Mrs. Dorrington, without noting that the Pastor was clad in mourning, which, black being his usual garb, might easily be overlooked. "I am in great trouble about Fay."
"Why what is the matter?" replied the

Pastor, anxiously. "You make me very uneasy."

"Well, she is very crotchety or perverse, or both together. Girls of her age always are. They learn German and read Goëthe, and fancy it is fine to have preferences and attachments, and elective affinities, and she could do nothing more inopportune at the present moment."

"Fay's notions may be a little enthusiastic," observed the Pastor, thoughtfully; "but I remember I was once the same myself, and I have heard you were not much wiser."

"We needn't rake up our own silly age to excuse hers. I want her rather to shun my faults than to repeat them, and I give her the advantage of my experience for the purpose."

"Your experience has been bitter, and so has mine. Perhaps it leads us to judge poor human nature too sternly. Fay is happier in her romance. Why should you seek to destroy it?"

"I have told you why. It interferes with my plans for her, and I can't allow her to throw away a good prospect of marriage."

This announcement silenced the Pastor.

"You will agree it would be very foolish, with her slender provision," pursued Mrs. Dorrington.

"Well, I don't exactly comprehend you. You say a *prospect of marriage*."

"That is not the point. What I want to overcome is Fay's perverseness—her unwillingness."

"She pleads want of affection, I suppose? Would I could believe in affection, too!"

"How can you entertain such a wish, when you know it would be a delusion—know this sentimentality is all nonsense, and ends in disappointment,—the bitterest our nature can feel!"

"Bitter as it is, it is better to go through the experience than take it on trust. An old head would be out of place on Fay's shoulders, and how much more a withered heart in her breast!"

"I didn't expect to hear you talk in this

strain, Isaac, particularly after being so shamefully jilted." The words made the Pastor wince. "I rather relied upon you to bring Fay into a better frame of mind. I believe you can influence her, and you must—you really must, do your best for me in this matter. I will have her down, and leave you together."

And Mrs. Dorrington walked towards the bell.

"No!" cried her nephew, now much agitated; "you put upon me more than I can undertake. Nor have you yet told me even whom you wish her to marry."

"That was an oversight. The proposal comes from Mr. Granby in behalf of his nephew."

"Not Ralph Granby!" exclaimed the Pastor, in a tone of astonishment.

"Certainly, he," returned Mrs. Dorrington. "And why not?"

"Why, then there will be affection on neither side."

"Consequently, neither side can complain," rejoined Mrs. Dorrington. "But we

have said enough on that point. I ask you if Ralph Granby isn't a suitor any girl might be proud of—any mother intrust with her daughter?"

"He is all this."

"Then, why do you hesitate? I tell you in confidence she won't come in for Dorrington Manor." The Pastor's face flushed, then turned pale. "What is more," continued Mrs. Dorrington, "this marriage stands between us and ruin."

"Can you be in earnest?"

"Too much so! Fay will admit it, if you press her, so pray exert all your powers to bring her to a sense of her duty."

"Her duty—yes!" said the Pastor, with a distracted air. "Certainly, what you have now confided to me casts on her a great responsibility. And it may be my duty to try to show her this. Anyhow, I will see her."

"I will send her to you," said Mrs. Dorrington.

And the Pastor sank back on the sofa to await the interview.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FAY IS PERSUADED TO ACCEPT—AN ESTATE.

FAY came into the room with flushed cheek and downcast eye, and timid, reluctant step. But her air brightened as she saw the Pastor.

"I thought it was somebody else," she said, giving him her hand.

"Whom did you think it was?" he answered.

"Mama didn't say, but we expect Ralph Granby, and I thought it was he."

"Ralph isn't coming to-day, I am sure," replied the Pastor, "for I have seen him, and he told me he was going immediately into Devonshire. By the way, I hear you are to marry him, Fay."

"They tell me so," sighed Fay.

"Whom do you call *they*?"

"My mama and his uncle."

"But hasn't he proposed it himself?"

"He has never made the slightest reference to it."

"Still, it seems to be all settled, and your mama is very earnest about it."

"Too earnest! She says it has been the hope of her life to see me mistress at Granby Hall."

"Ah!" cried the Pastor, with a quick look up. "And don't you wish it yourself?"

"I should be miserable there—wretched. If it is to be, I fear I shall go mad."

"Granby Hall is a beautiful place," urged the Pastor.

"I don't care what it is. I hate the very name of it."

"Fay, you must consider this matter very seriously. Your mama declares she is in a position that makes the marriage of the highest importance to her, and, in such a

case, you may be inclined to struggle against a little indifference to Ralph."

"You are very cruel to talk to me in this way," answered Fay, now in tears.

"You can't really think so, when you know I do it by your mama's request. Can you wish I had refused her?"

"Certainly. My hope was in you—that you would remonstrate with her—protest, reason, oppose all your influence to such a contract; marriage I will not call it."

"Contract it is, I grant; but she alleges this contract will save her from ruin."

Fay clasped her hands.

"Unhappy that I am!" she exclaimed, bitterly. "Can't we resign ourselves to a humbler position? Can't I become a governess, or teach music, or turn artist, and support myself by my own exertions? What are state rooms, and carriages, and horses, and an establishment of servants, where they are bought with misery—such misery!"

"Better a dinner of herbs with content," observed the Pastor, soothingly.

"Yet you urge me to marry Ralph Granby, for the sake of Granby Hall," returned Fay, in an angry tone.

"Not for the sake of Granby Hall, for that his uncle can no longer devolve on him." Fay raised her head. "For some weeks he has been threatened with an action for ejectment," continued the Pastor, "but it was thought his opponent would be unable to prove the marriage of an ancestress from whom the claim is derived. The trial came on this morning, and, most unexpectedly, proof of the marriage was found last night, at some church in the city. This decided the case, and the court pronounced a decree, vesting the Granby estate in—whom do you think?"

"Tell me," said Fay, breathless.

"Ralph Granby's divorced wife—Letty Rivers!"

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Fay.

"All is wonderful, and all inscrutable," observed the Pastor.

"I am sorry for poor Ralph," murmured Fay.

"Perhaps you would like to marry him, after all?"

"No, no!" said Fay, shrinking.

As she spoke, she looked up, and now noted the Pastor's dress.

"Are you in mourning?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Who is dead?"

"Our cousin Dorrington."

"Poor man!" said Fay, in a tone of regret. "And his death will bring mama a new disappointment, though one for which she is prepared."

"It may not be altogether what she seems to imagine. There is still a possibility that Dorrington Manor may fall to you."

"By waiting for another death! Who is to go before me now?"

"Hush! Let us not talk lightly of death. Can any know he may not himself be the first summoned?"

"I spoke in bitterness, not levity—in scorn of the sordidness which looks to profiting by such an event."

"That is more like you, but scorn is not a good feeling, even when thus provoked: we should rather feel pity, remembering our own infirmity. However, in this case, the estate may fall to you through failure of conditions."

"How can that be?"

"The person to whom it is devised first is to receive it with the condition that he takes the name and arms of Dorrington, and within six months marries. Otherwise the estate is to pass to you."

"Then I shall never get it."

"Well, there happens to be a difficulty on the point of the marriage. The new Mr. Dorrington has been disappointed in that respect; this is known; and no lady would marry a man who has given away his first affection?"

"Let him try, that is all. Let him hold out an estate, and I should like to know what lady would refuse him."

"Well, this very morning he did hold out an estate, and the lady refused."

"Impossible!"

"I can tell you her name."

"Somebody I know! Then who was it?"

"Fay Dorrington."

"I!" exclaimed Fay, looking round at him.

"Didn't you refuse Granby Hall, when I held it out to you?" cried the Pastor.

"But you said Mr. Dorrington!"

"The *new* Mr. Dorrington, which I am to be, or I must give up the estate."

"Then Dorrington Manor is willed to you," cried Fay.

And she jumped up, and clapped her hands.

"You forget I am to marry," said Isaac.

Fay's face clouded.

"If I don't," Isaac continued, "the estate will go to you."

"And I won't have it," cried Fay, pouting.

"You seem to have quite an objection to estates," replied the Pastor.

He raised his eyes, and saw there were

tears in hers—that her colour came and went, and her lips quivered; and, somehow, he caught an inspiration from the signs.

“If you won’t take Dorrington Manor from me, will you share it with me?” he said, tenderly. “Will you make it a home and rest for me, dear Fay? You know what I have been, what I am! Take me as this, and I shall still hope to make you happy.”

Fay’s hand was in his, and her face buried on his breast.

“Now we shall surprise your mama,” he said, as they heard Mrs. Dorrington at the door.

Mrs. Dorrington entered in haste.

“Such sad news!” she cried, holding up an open letter. “Of course, it puts an end to the proposal about you, Fay. Here is a letter from Mr. Simmer, telling me the Granbys have lost their estate. Calamities never come alone, and I thought there would be some other misfortune, when Fay lost Dorrington Manor.”

"We can't say she has lost Dorrington Manor, aunt," observed the Pastor, with a smile; "for Dorrington Manor is mine, and Fay has consented to be my wife—conditionally, of course, on your approving her choice."

"On my approving!" exclaimed Mrs. Dorrington, joyously. "To whom could I give her so willingly—so gladly!"

She turned to embrace Fay. But Fay had slipped out of the room.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

TURNING OUT.

THE unexpected issue of the action of ejectment overwhelmed Mr. Granby. He declared he could not endure to go through the business, and devolved this duty on Ralph, who, accordingly, wrote to Mr. Simmer, arranging to give him possession of the Hall next day. Ralph went down in the evening by the mail, and reached the Hall by daybreak, when he paid off the servants, retaining only one, who was to join the Squire's establishment in Staffordshire. With this domestic he waited but Mr. Simmer's appearance to bid adieu to the home of his ancestors.

Sadly he walked through the old house, visiting every room, and taking a last look

at the loved walls and familiar furniture. In the Hall itself he lingered long ; for here hung the portraits of his race, carrying him back through so many generations. Of all those Granbys, had any been so unhappy as himself? had any, in the ages of romance, gone through such experiences, such a battle of love against fortune? It seemed to him that he had himself laid down his life for love—that is, the hopes of his life and its prospects. And now did he not see his folly? That enthusiasm which might have carried him to great objects, giving position, if not distinction—that first energy of life, was all spent. And what had it won? Alas! what it too often reaps—disappointment, mortification, and failure!

He had again aroused himself to face his destiny. The time might come when he would again recover his elasticity, and take his lot in cheerfulness. At present his disposition did not arise from fortitude, nor even from resignation; it was simply endurance.

The sound of carriage-wheels notified the approach of Mr. Simmer, and Ralph followed the solitary servant to the door, arriving as the carriage stopped. Hardly could he believe his eyes, for the first to descend from the carriage was a lady—no other than Letty. He hastily retreated to the hall. That she should carry her revenge so far as this—come herself, and receive from him the surrender of his home and his inheritance! Cruel! ungenerous! He walked up the hall, hearing her step behind—hearing it quicken, stop, and start forward again. Good heaven! her hand was on his arm—he felt her touch—he flew round.

“Letty!”

“My love! my Ralph! my true—true husband!”

What a cry, what exclamations, what passionate transports.

“Here is a letter I wrote you from Paris, but which was intercepted by Bradley.”

“You did write! Dear, true Ralph! And I could so misjudge you!”

Even then, in that eager moment, so rapturous and so confusing, she read the letter, then pressed it to her lips, and then to her breast. And then she clung round Ralph's breast.

"I am happy now—so happy, I could almost die. Only I could not part with my husband—not even in death."

"You call me husband still, Letty!"

"For ever—yes, ever and ever!"

"I had determined that I should never be called so by any other lips!" exclaimed Ralph, devotedly.

Letty drew his arms round her.

They were now interrupted by Mr. Rivers and Mr. Simmer, who had accompanied Letty to the house, but, by a tacit understanding, remained in the carriage, to allow her time to come to an explanation with Ralph. They at once saw how matters stood, but made no demonstration, taking the reconciliation as a thing of course, and the meeting ended by their all going off in the carriage to Mr. Mead's. There they

met a joyous welcome, and found an excellent luncheon, provided on short notice by Alice, and which the apothecary especially recommended to Letty and Ralph.

"Take in protoplasm," he said. "Remember this—food derives its nourishment from absorption of the sun's rays, and its amount of nourishment is in proportion to the amount of the absorption of rays. I daresay that is the kernel of the old myth about ambrosia, the food of the gods. At any rate, sunshine is the food of men and women—and now we have it!"

So all were made happy—Ralph by a new marriage with Letty, the Pastor by wedding Fay, and Jack Reeve by espousing Alice. What remains to be told? Let us hasten to drop the curtain—in the sunshine!

THE END.

